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THE Nation.

A HOLE IN THE WORLD
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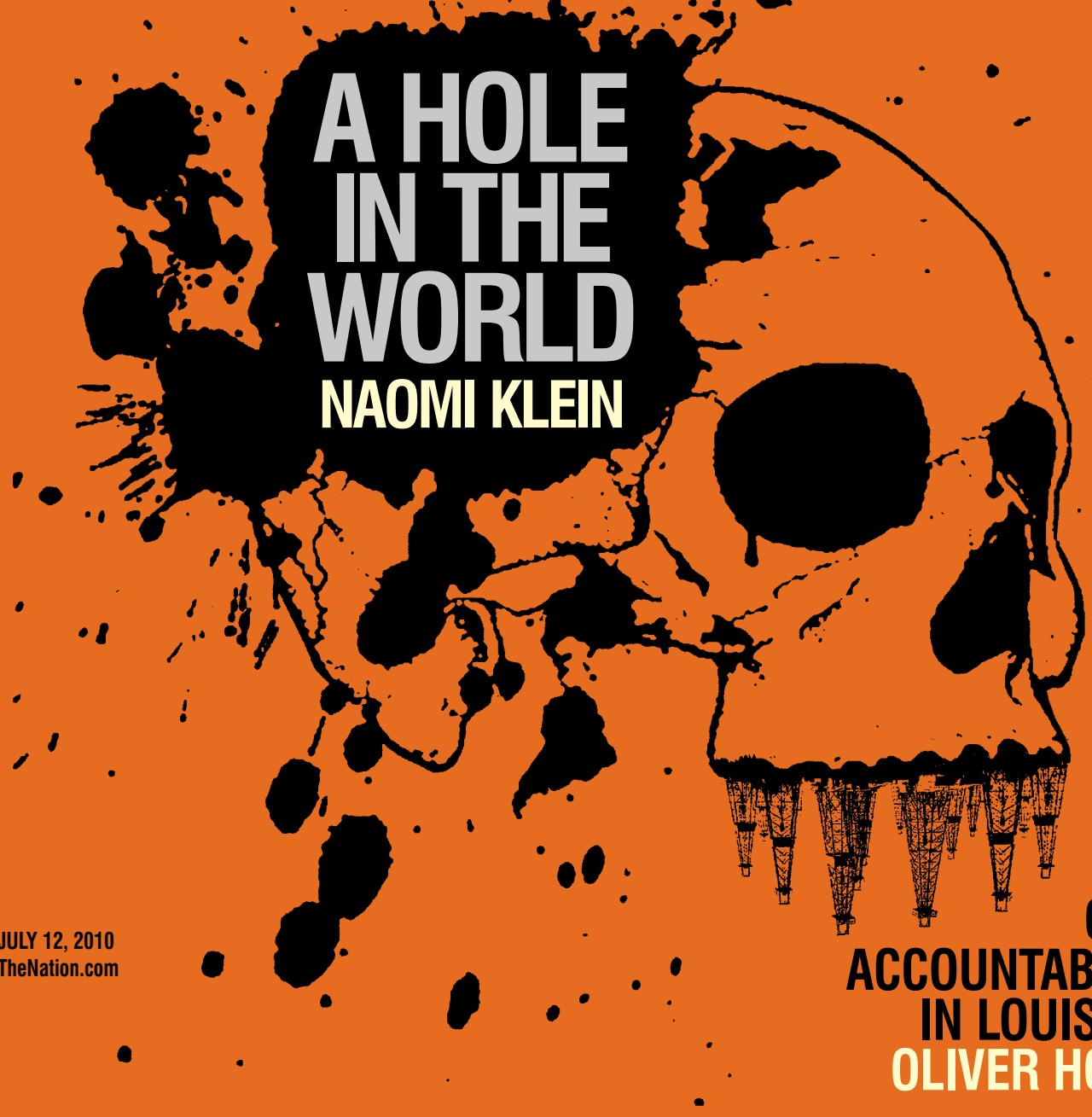

JULY 12, 2010
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OLIVER HOUCK

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THE EDITORS

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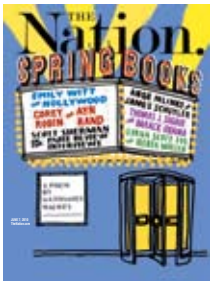

Robin Shrugged

NEW YORK CITY

Corey Robin, in "Garbage and Gravitas" [June 7], quotes some important Ayn Rand passages, but his critique raises ad hominem to a new level: Rand favored some classical composers over others and preferred operetta to opera, so her ideas are invalid.

More shocking is this argument: Ayn Rand held that whether you live or die is of fundamental importance to you, and Adolf Hitler held that whether the state "lives" or "dies" is of fundamental importance to you, so Rand and Hitler are the same. We are asked to equate Hitler with the modern era's greatest defender of the individual's right to his own life. Rand, the creator of a morality based on one's life as one's ultimate value and reason as one's only guide is equated with the anti-individual, obedience-demanding, death-worshiping Nazi ideology.

How about responding to Rand's arguments, for key Objectivist tenets, notably: reason is man's only means of knowledge, reason is man's means of survival, the choice to think or not is the locus of man's free will, rational thought cannot be coerced, man's life as a rational being is the standard of morality, rationality is man's primary virtue, individual rights are moral principles of social interaction following from the preceding.

Robin quotes criticism by Sidney Hook that mistakes Rationalism for Objectivism. Objectivism holds that all knowledge is based, directly or indirectly, on sensory observation. The role of axioms, such as A is A, is not to provide premises for some Rationalist deduction but rather to ground methods of inference and norms of cognition. "Axiomatic concepts are epistemological guidelines" (*Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*). Because A is A, *modus ponens* is valid. Because contradictions can't exist, we must check our conclusions for consistency: "No concept man forms is valid unless he integrates it without contradiction into the total sum of his knowledge" (*Atlas Shrugged*).

Rather than rely on dubious anecdotes about Rand's personal life, a serious intellectual would investigate her nonfiction and consult the best of the secondary literature by philosophy professionals.

HARRY BINSWANGER

SEATTLE

"Far from needing explanation, Rand's success explains itself." So why does Corey Robin, through five pages of sneering vitriol, feel the need to "explain" her to us? This is trying too hard, which makes one wonder what he's trying to hide from us, or himself.

I'll pass over the patently silly insinuations of a connection between Rand and fascism; that kind of smear was perfected by Whittaker Chambers (and discredited) long ago. Instead, on to the real issues:

Rand's philosophical significance? Notwithstanding the cluelessness of Sidney Hook and Robert Nozick, her importance sure seems evident to the Ayn Rand Society, an affiliated group of the American Philosophical Association. Rand's grasp of Aristotle or her place in the Aristotelian tradition? With Aristotle, Rand holds that: (1) there's a knowable, objective reality; (2) life is sustained by constant internally generated action (an idea the reviewer seems to resent); (3) it is possible to live, flourish and be happy by discovering a moral code of rationally selfish values.

She improves on Aristotle by explicitly validating an objective standard of value, "man's life qua man," whereas Aristotle begged the question by looking at qualities displayed in his prior-designated "great-souled" men. Thereupon Rand discusses why the primary virtues are: rationality, honesty, integrity, independence, productiveness and pride. All this is what Robin wants to ridicule? Really?

Perhaps it's Rand's worship of achievement that most upsets him, and her agreement with Spinoza that "all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare." Or her sui generis status. In ethics alone, how then to explain why she provides the only fundamental account opposing Kant's ethics of duty and self-sacrifice on the one hand, and Nietzsche's blatantly irrational, predatory, cynical egoism on the other?

Is Robin seriously objecting to Rand's holding out the possibility that individuals can live together in a mutually beneficial, nonsacrificial social arrangement, i.e., where the right to life, liberty, property and the pursuit of happiness is consistently upheld? This isn't a worthy inquiry?

One other point: Robin has Rand's literary

(continued on page 24)

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New Energy in DC?

You know the politics of energy are changing in the United States when the senior senator from the oil-soaked state of Louisiana publicly admits that the oil era is passing and

EDITORIAL

"the transition to clean renewable energy [must] begin immediately." So said Democrat Mary Landrieu, responding to President Obama's Oval Office speech of June 15. Landrieu's words are remarkable, considering her long record of devotion to the oil industry. Like her state's junior senator, Republican David Vitter, Landrieu seems never to have met an oil industry subsidy she didn't like. In this, she remains far from alone. Recently she joined a majority of the Senate in extending $35 billion in subsidies to the industry, even as BP's deep-sea well continued to gush tens of thousands of gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico.

And yet, as Landrieu's rhetorical evolution shows, the old calculus on Capitol Hill may be shifting. Obama's prospects for passing strong climate and energy legislation will only grow brighter if Republicans continue their self-sabotaging strategy of apologizing to BP, following Representative Joe Barton's bumbling lead. But the White House must seize the opportunity this moment affords. The president did himself no favors with his vague, lackluster speech, though he did rebound nicely the next day, staring down BP big shots during a four-and-a-half-hour meeting in the White House to win $20 billion for a fund to compensate individuals and businesses damaged by the gulf disaster. The president also took a firm stand with his moratorium on deepwater drilling—earning not only the ire of Big Oil and its Congressional champions but a ruling from a federal judge in New Orleans to block the moratorium, now on appeal.

Will Obama continue this relatively tough line as he pushes for energy and climate legislation in Congress? He clearly understands the big-picture reasons the United States needs a green energy revolution. Politically, to rely on foreign oil leaves us hostage to events outside our borders, including the desire of some oil-rich states to smite the Great Satan by closing off supply. Geologically, experts say peak oil is either imminent or has already arrived. The easy-to-access petroleum on this planet has been exhausted, which is a big part of the reason BP was drilling so deep—nearly four miles beneath the earth's surface. Economically, clean energy is a key to prosperity and competitiveness in the twenty-first century, as China and Germany clearly recognize.

But Obama has offered precious few specifics on how his administration plans to rise to this challenge, and the approaches on the table in Congress leave much to be desired.

Public anger at BP is real and unlikely to wane anytime soon. Popular support for clean renewable energy is broad and deep. It's hard to imagine a better time for the president to stand up to the corporate chieftains whose greed and arrogance produced not only the BP blowout but the dysfunctional energy system plaguing this country. We have seen two different Obamas in recent days: the Obama of the Oval Office speech and the Obama of the showdown with the BP bosses. The latter Obama was a calm but fierce fighter, willing to stand up for ordinary citizens through words and actions that cannot be misunderstood. The future of America's energy and climate policy—and perhaps of Obama's presidency—will depend in no small measure on which Barack Obama we see more of in the weeks and months ahead.

Page 31: Ambrose Bierce: time to testify

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US Funds the Taliban, II

To protect its supply routes in Afghanistan, the US military is funneling millions of dollars into the hands of a small number of powerful Afghan warlords who run a massive protection racket and may be paying off the Taliban, according to a Congressional report released on June 22.

COMMENT

The scathing report, titled "Warlord, Inc.," was the result of a six-month Congressional investigation prompted by a *Nation* cover story, "How the US Funds the Taliban" [November 30, 2009], about the largest US logistics contract in Afghanistan. The report by the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs confirms the findings of the *Nation* article, which was reported in conjunction with the Investigative Fund at The Nation Institute. The story described how US taxpayer dollars for the "Host Nation Trucking (HNT)" contract were being funneled to warlords and insurgents in an elaborate system of extortion to secure safe passage for military goods. Under that $2.16 billion contract, the US Army has hired eight civilian trucking firms to transport supplies to the web of combat outposts and bases set up throughout Afghanistan.

The Army Criminal Investigative Command (CID) has opened a criminal investigation into the HNT contract. A spokesman for the Army CID said the investigation was ongoing but declined to release details.

In the contract, firms pay for their own private security, with little oversight from the US government. The subcommittee report says the resulting system promotes corruption and strengthens warlords—while the US military looks on. The contract "fuels warlordism, extortion, and corruption," the report asserts, "and it may be a significant source of funding for insurgents."

"When HNT contractors self-reported to the military that they were being extorted by warlords for protection payments for safe passage and that these payments were 'funding the insurgency,' they were largely met with indifference and inaction," the report adds. Among its most significant findings: "security for the US supply chain is principally provided by warlords"; "the highway warlords run a protection racket"; "protection payments for safe passage are a significant source of funding for the Taliban."

"It's outrageous that this is going on," says Congressman John Tierney, chair of the subcommittee, in an interview with *The Nation*. "The evidence indicates a protection racket that would make Tony Soprano proud."

Subcommittee investigators obtained e-mails and documents in which US contractors repeatedly warn the military that they are paying bribes and being extorted and that US taxpayer funds might be going to the Taliban. In 2009 a contractor wrote frankly to military officers, "It is believed" that certain funds "are being paid as bribes to local Commanders, and therefore inevitably to the enemy." In another case, a contractor wrote in an internal company memo of a meeting with the military where there was discussion of "funding the insurgency" with "what is estimated at 1.6–2 Million Dollars per week." In an e-mail cited by the report, a contractor shares explicit details with the military logistics headquarters at Bagram Air Base, writ-

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Noted.

AFGHAN EXITS: Firing Gen. **Stanley McChrystal** and replacing him with Gen. **David Petraeus** won't fix President Obama's Afghanistan strategy. Petraeus literally wrote the handbook on counterinsurgency (COIN), which in Afghanistan means a decades-long, trillion-dollar nation-building effort to secure the country village by village. That said, McChrystal has been a leading advocate of COIN, and his exit could provide an opportunity for a rethink.

McChrystal, of course, fragged himself. In a series of interviews with **Michael Hastings** for **Rolling Stone**, McChrystal and his inner circle engaged in an orgy of profane insubordination, replete with homophobic slurs, raised middle fingers and references to Vice President **Joe Biden** as "Bite Me." Gen. **Jim Jones**, the national security adviser in the White House, was called a "clown." And in a deft touch, McChrystal grimaced in disgust after getting an e-mail from **Richard Holbrooke**, US special envoy for Afghanistan. As McChrystal pocketed the phone, an aide said, "Make sure you don't get any of that on your leg."

But the issue is politics, not personalities. Last year, McChrystal engaged in a virtual insurrection to pressure the White House to escalate the war, forcing Obama to read him the riot act on Air Force One. Since December, he has seethed with resentment over the president's July 2011 deadline for the start of a US pullout. As a commander, McChrystal has failed: the vaunted attack on Marja unraveled, and the much-touted Kandahar offensive has failed to materialize.

As the *Rolling Stone* profile reveals, Obama is at war with his own commanders in Afghanistan. As McChrystal departs and Petraeus takes over, the president has to take command of the war, press for a political settlement with the Taliban and work hard to ensure that the July 2011 deadline is met.

ROBERT DREYFUSS

SENATE SUNLIGHT? My conservative friends have suddenly become ardent advocates for transparency. They want to know what goes on behind the closed doors of the Obama White House and Democratic Congressional offices. I agree: secrecy is the sin that destroys democracy, no matter which party engages in it.

Where to begin? How about with one of the most abusive practices in Washington: the use of anonymous "holds" to block Senate action on presidential nominations. Under Senate rules, individual members are allowed to anonymously block consideration of nominees for six days. Then the senators are obligated to reveal themselves and the reasons for their holds. In recent years, however, groups of senators have begun to game the system by coordinating a series of holds in a strategy that can delay action for months, even years.

Missouri Senator **Claire McCaskill** is leading the fight for transparency. She's gotten most Democrats and nine Republicans to back her proposal to abolish the rule that allows anonymous holds and back-room game-playing. McCaskill is right: nomination battles are fine, but they should be fought in public.

JOHN NICHOLS

SPEECH CRIMES: In the peculiar universe defined by the Supreme Court's recent First Amendment rulings, corporations have speech rights that allow them to drown out the voices of ordinary human beings, but human rights activists can be sent to jail for fifteen years merely for advocating for peace and human rights. In **Holder v. Humanitarian Law Project**, the Court ruled on June 21 that the First Amendment does not protect a human rights group that sought to provide rights training and peacemaking assistance to the **Kurdistan Workers' Party** (PKK) in Turkey. The United States has designated the PKK as a terrorist organization and prohibited all "material support" to it, including speech advocating human rights. Six justices ruled, for the first time in the Court's history, that Congress can make it a crime to advocate for wholly lawful, nonviolent ends.

According to the Obama administration (and the Bush administration before it), the "material support" law makes it a crime to write an amicus brief in the Supreme Court on behalf of a designated group, to assist it in advocating before the UN or Congress, or to write or publish an op-ed in conjunction with such a group. The Obama administration made the untenable argument that the law did not regulate speech at all but only conduct, and therefore it need not satisfy First Amendment review.

The Supreme Court dismissed that contention, acknowledging that the law criminalized speech on the basis of its content and therefore had to satisfy the same scrutiny, at least in theory, that the Court used to invalidate the **McCain-Feingold** campaign finance law. But in fact, the Court applied only the most deferential review. It reasoned that the mere possibility, unsupported by any evidence, that human rights advocacy might somehow advance a designated group's illegal ends was enough to justify prosecuting human rights advocates as "terrorists" for their speech, even when that speech was indisputably designed to discourage terrorism. In the eyes of this Court, then, multinational corporations must be allowed to spend millions on political campaigns, but a human rights activist can be sent to jail for pursuing peace.

DAVID COLE

THE LOST GENERATION: While the Great Recession has affected Americans of all ages, young people have been especially hard-hit. The Bureau of Labor Statistics' May figures place the unemployment rate for 16- to 24-year-olds at 18.1 percent, nearly double the national average. Young job seekers are not only overrepresented in recession-prone industries like leisure and hospitality; the crisis has pitted them against more experienced and educated workers. Minorities have fared particularly poorly, with Hispanics and blacks experiencing the biggest jumps in unemployment in recent years.

The state of the youth labor force augurs ill for the country's economic future. Studies show that the first years of employment are formative. Almost two-thirds of lifetime wage growth happens in the first ten years of a career, and graduates entering the workforce during recession times often remain relatively underpaid throughout their careers. Of the working-age youth who still have jobs, almost one-third do not receive health insurance. This climate of discouragement, lack of opportunity, demographic inequality and health insecurity offers a grim forecast for the future workforce.

AARON ROSS AND LAUREN SUTHERLAND

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ing that "the current price to the Taliban is $500 per truck from Kandahar to Herat, $50 from Kabul to Ghazni." Driving home how much influence the warlords now have, the report includes a contractor's printed list of forty-four military supply routes, each apparently controlled by one of ten warlords. The subcommittee report compares it to a "*prix fixe* menu" for security.

Subcommittee staff interviewed one key warlord, Commander Ruhullah, who was first identified in the *Nation* article, calling him "the single largest security provider for the US supply chain in Afghanistan." The report says that Ruhullah, nicknamed "The Butcher" by villagers along his route, has a private army of 600 armed guards. "Despite this critical and sensitive role," the report, underlining the chaotic nature of Afghan security, says, "nobody from the Department of Defense or the U.S. intelligence community has ever met with him (except for a brief detention by U.S. Special Forces on what he says are false drug charges)."

As *The Nation* had reported, Ruhullah operated with the private security company Watan Risk, which is owned by two brothers, Ahmad Rateb Popal and Rashid Popal. The brothers are cousins of President Hamid Karzai, and both have old convictions for federal heroin charges in the United States.

In a phone interview from Kabul with *The Nation*, Ahmad Rateb Popal—who was interviewed for the Congressional report along with his brother—questioned its findings. In previous communications with *The Nation* he denied making any payments to the Taliban. He also says that few trucking executives even knew about conditions on the road his firm secures, which is known as Highway 1. "Nobody has even been to Highway 1 and yet everyone is an expert," he said. "It raises a lot of questions about the depth of the report."

According to the subcommittee investigators, Commander Ruhullah denied bribing the Taliban but admitted that he paid bribes to "governors, police chiefs, and army generals." He said he guarded 3,500 trucks per month, charging up to $1,500 a truck, a fee that ultimately comes from US taxpayers.

The subcommittee report found that Defense Department oversight of the multibillion-dollar contract was "virtually nonexistent." The officer in charge of the technical contract oversight told subcommittee staff that his unit had "zero visibility" over the subcontractors who did the work of bringing supplies to various US bases and outposts. One lieutenant colonel to whom contractors had complained told the subcommittee that he couldn't have investigated. "That was way, way, way, way above my level," he said. "My job was to get barrels of insulating foam for tents out to Dwyer so marines didn't suffocate from heat exhaustion."

While the military unit that oversaw the contract treated the allegations with "indifference," according to the subcommittee, the Army launched a criminal investigation. The subcommittee released a PowerPoint from the CIC-Afghanistan titled "Host Nation Trucking. Payments to Insurgents." Most of the slides have been redacted. In one e-mail cited by the subcommittee, dated in November 2009, a military commander says, "We had the FBI, CIA, CID and three or four other acronym agencies in the office to work this topic."

ARAM ROSTON

Aram Roston, a magazine writer and broadcast journalist, is the author of The Man Who Pushed America to War *(Nation Books).*

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

BP

(Sung by Representative Joe Barton, to the tune of "Blue Moon")

BP, you've been so badly defamed—
By shakedown artists so robbed, by petty
  bureaucrats blamed.
BP, I'm sorry they've been so strict on
These damages. You've been picked on,
Without a case to convict on.

But pay no mind to all these overreactions,
For memories of this one more spill
Will fade, like all your other infractions,
And once again we'll shout, "Drill, baby, drill!"

BP, you've been so badly defamed,
The public's been so inflamed.
BP, I'm truly ashamed.

Bloody Sunday's Architects

The British excel at political theater, but the carefully staged publication of the long-awaited Saville report on Bloody Sunday produced an effect no government choreographer could possibly have predicted. A large crowd, several hundred strong, of Northern Ireland's nationalists had gathered by a TV screen in front of Derry's Victorian Guildhall awaiting—anxiously, fearfully—an announcement to accompany the publication by the new Tory prime minister, David Cameron. Four words caused the crowd to raise a prolonged cheer: "I am deeply sorry," Cameron told the House of Commons.

COMMENT

After thirty-eight years, the British government had finally, officially, apologized for the shooting by paratroopers of twenty-seven unarmed Catholics, thirteen of whom died, as they marched protesting internment-without-trial through Derry's Bogside on January 30, 1972.

Cameron, an old Etonian of the toff class so despised by working-class Irish Catholics, then declared the unequivocal results of Lord Saville's investigation, the longest and costliest public inquiry in British history—twelve years in the making, at a cost to the taxpayers of $300 million. Saville's report had

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found the shootings in the Bogside "unjustified and unjustifiable," in the words of Cameron. Those shot were not IRA gunmen or bombers, as the army had long claimed. They were civilians, stone-throwers at worst. More cheers at the Guildhall. More clenched fists punching the summer air.

Cameron's apology was "pitch-perfect," wrote Simon Hoggart, the *Guardian*'s veteran parliamentary sketch writer. "I doubt if the Commons has ever heard such a statement so raw, etching with acid into the polished surface of our national self-image."

But as the cheers died down and people started to read the ten-volume, 5,000-page Saville report, they discovered that Saville had cleared the top army brass, finding fault only with the paratroopers' battalion commander, Lt. Col. Derek Wilford. He is the Lieutenant Calley of Bloody Sunday. Wilford was blamed for exceeding his orders and allowing his trigger-happy troops to chase fleeing marchers into the heart of the Bogside. Saville had no reprimand for the generals who planned the operation, nor for the politicians in Belfast and London—the prime minister at the time was another Tory, Edward Heath.

Whether the families or government prosecutors will seek criminal trials of the paratroopers for unlawful killing, or for perjury for lying about their actions, is not yet clear. But whatever the outcome, the Saville report has underscored the difficulty of "truth and reconciliation" inquiries, à la South Africa, in countries where there has been no revolution and where the government remains essentially the same, just of a different stripe. In Tiananmen Square, Grozny, Darfur, Falluja and Gaza, the real truth will always be hard to come by, was Saville's message.

In the end, it is noteworthy that Saville relied heavily on statements taken by reporters in the first week after the shootings. Those were the interviews that often proved to be the most accurate and durable over the years, the report acknowledges. Reporters' notebooks, including mine as a member then of the *Sunday Times*'s Insight team, took on surprising value. When witnesses forgot, or did not own up to what they had said earlier for fear it would land them in trouble, Saville relied, time and again, on the first cut of history.

Saville's report is now accepted with relief by the families as the official truth—but only regarding who shot whom. The darker side of Bloody Sunday—and of the forty years of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, during which more than 3,500 civilians and soldiers died—was the role of Britain's secret service, MI5. Here Saville failed.

The example attracting most publicity is an allegation by MI5 officers that Martin McGuinness, then second in command of the Derry Provisional IRA and now Northern Ireland's deputy first minister, told an MI5 undercover agent that he had probably initiated the paratroopers' lethal response by firing a submachine gun in the Bogside. McGuinness vigorously denied the charge. MI5 refused to produce its agent for examination, on the grounds that exposure would endanger his life. Saville was forced to conclude that it would be "unwise (and, indeed, unfair) to place much weight" on this hearsay evidence. And he didn't. But the truth remains locked up. The suspicion will linger with those who choose to give credence to the story—and that, of course, was the intention.

In dumping all the blame on Colonel Wilford and clearing army commander Maj. Gen. Robert Ford, Saville concluded that Ford "neither knew nor should have known at any stage that his decision would or was likely to result in soldiers firing unjustifiably." But paratroopers, famous for going into battle "hard and ready," are not obvious units of choice for urban security or civil rights marches.

In the run-up to Bloody Sunday, Ford had favored an escalation in the army's response. The IRA was operating a "no go" area in the Bogside, and Ford was determined to restore law and order. He told a senior commander he was coming to the conclusion that the level of force required was, after clear warnings, "to shoot selected ringleaders" among Derry's stone-throwing youths. Ford chose the paratroopers, who were armed with standard NATO rifles. As they entered the Bogside that January day, Ford was on the street to urge them on: "Go on 1 Para, go and get them." The risk to innocent bystanders of using such troops, prepped to shoot, and such weapons, designed for maximum killing power, was clear. And the architects of this plan bear no responsibility?

PETER PRINGLE

Peter Pringle is the author, with Philip Jacobson, of Those Are Real Bullets: Bloody Sunday, Derry, 1972.

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This week on **The Nation on GRITtv**: Watch Richard Kim on accountability for the oil spill—and the broader energy agenda; Max Fraser on Andy Stern's SEIU; and Melissa Harris-Lacewell on youth progressivism.

This week on The Breakdown, Christopher Hayes asks Greenpeace's Kert Davies, **Is Offshore Drilling Ever Safe?** Is BP unique in its ability to cause catastrophe, or is the entire practice of offshore oil drilling inherently dangerous—regardless of which company is running the rig?

The organization that funded research bashing donor conception is now fighting against marriage rights for same-sex couples. Should what it says about nontraditional families be trusted? Emily Douglas says no, in **The Kids Are Just Fine, Thanks**.

In April, Human Rights Watch researcher Samer Muscati traveled across Iraq to assess the human rights situation in the country, seven years after US and coalition forces invaded. View his photographs in **Slide Show: A New Iraq Tethered by Old Legacies**.

In 2008 a gas company offered Josh Fox $100,000 to lease his family's land for natural gas extraction. His new documentary, *Gasland*, explores the environmental devastation that "hydraulic fracturing" wreaks. Nora Eisenberg spoke to the director in **Onshore Drilling Disasters Waiting to Happen**.

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Alexander Cockburn

A Disaster That Could Change Everything

On June 11 Obama linked the BP oil blowout to the attacks of September 11, 2001. He made the parallel in terms of impact on the American psyche and of the spur to chart new policies. There are less flattering ways—to Obama personally—to compare the events. Few performances in George W. Bush's wretched tenure aroused more derision than his conduct when he was alerted to the first attack on the Twin Towers, continuing to confer with the children in that Florida classroom.

Bush didn't want to scare the children, a laudable instinct. Obama, less laudably, didn't want to upset the grown-ups. Within hours of the explosion, NOAA scientists and federal officials were preparing for "the spill of the decade," with worst-case assessments of 110,000 barrels a day. But the White House, in collusion with BP, successfully capped the outflow of disturbingly high estimates, lowballing it at 1,000 barrels a day, then crawling reluctantly up to 5,000.

In his nerveless speech from the Oval Office on June 15, where he made the extraordinary claim that "in the coming weeks and days, [BP's] efforts should capture up to 90 percent of the oil leaking out of the well," Obama reached for the traditional buck-pass of a blue-ribbon commission to assess the circumstances leading up to the April 20 explosion. It will be interesting to see just how diligently this commission excavates the incredible government indulgence toward the oil companies on ocean drilling. It could take off from the Clinton administration's Deep Water Royalty Relief Act of 1995, a bill encouraging oil companies like BP to start drilling for oil 5,000 feet below the surface of the Gulf of Mexico. When Ken Salazar was still a Colorado senator, he berated the Bush administration for its slothfulness in pushing forward with deep-sea drilling in the gulf.

In the first year of the Obama administration, Salazar's Interior Department put 53 million acres of offshore oil reserves up for lease, far eclipsing the records set by the Bush administration. As Jeffrey St. Clair describes in our *CounterPunch* newsletter, Salazar was adamant in retaining Chris Oynes as associate director of offshore drilling at the Minerals Management Service. As St. Clair explains, an outraged inspector general of the Interior Department discovered that on Oynes's watch "the repeat offenders in the oil industry were allowed to police themselves, writing their own environmental analyses, safety inspections and compliance reports, often in pencil for MMS regulators to trace over in ink."

By the time Obama declared on March 31 that "we've still got to make some tough decisions about opening new offshore areas for oil and gas development in ways that protect communities and protect coastlines," his administration had given the green light to BP's Deepwater Horizon well, giving this notoriously criminal company—a big contributor to the Obama 2008 campaign—a pat on the back for its safety record.

Struggling to recover from a Gallup poll conducted June 11–13 showing that 71 percent of Americans believe he had not been "tough enough" in dealing with BP, Obama announced on June 16 that under White House pressure BP is putting $20 billion in an independently run escrow fund to compensate individuals and businesses injured by the oil spill. Any satisfaction at this should be qualified by recalling that powerful international corporations like BP have armies of lawyers, lobbyists and politicians toiling to extinguish or diminish all financial sanctions imposed on them for criminal negligence.

We can set the benchmark here with the terrible 1984 disaster at Union Carbide's Bhopal plant in India. In 1989 an Indian Supreme Court–assisted settlement set compensation at $470 million. At that time, the government still claimed that the release of a toxic gas cloud had killed merely 3,000 and injured 102,000. Over the years the casualty list swelled to 574,367 victims, including (according to independent, authoritative counts) more than 20,000 dead. In other words, the compensation now worked out, on average, to around $800 per victim. After a quarter of a century, on June 7 of this year, seven former officials of Union Carbide's Indian subsidiary were convicted in a Bhopal court and sentenced to two years in prison for what was the world's greatest industrial disaster—and fined $2,100 each. All seven were out on bail within an hour. Punishment for the far more responsible officials in the US-based parent company? None.

Exxon Valdez? In 1994 a jury imposed damages of $5 billion on the company. In 2006 an appeals court halved this to $2.5 billion. And in June 2008 the Supreme Court cut this by 80 percent, to roughly $500 million—an average of $15,000 per plaintiff, of whom there were about 32,000. Lee Raymond's compensation package for his last year as Exxon CEO was $400 million.

We do not yet have the barest outline of the ultimate consequences of BP's blowout. There are serious scenarios by experts on the Oil Drum website suggesting that the outflow may not be halted until the entire reserve (which BP estimates at 2.1 billion gallons) has discharged into the gulf. That could be a grimly transformative moment in American political life, Judgment Day for decades of increasing submission of government to corporate rule, with vassals in every successive Oval Office. Few of them have been more compliant than the present incumbent, on whose oil spill crisis team is Lawrence Summers. This is the man who, as chief economist at the World Bank, declared in a notorious memo that "the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest-wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that." Follow the money—which BP, like the other big oil companies, has been sluicing into the political system for decades—and the requisite logic is always available. Our task: to ensure that the April 20 explosion and the aftermath make a dent in it. ■

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Katha Pollitt

Women on Top?

Don't worry, gentlemen. "The End of Men," Hanna Rosin's much discussed *Atlantic* cover story, isn't really about the end of men. It's about men's declining economic ability to dominate women and various sociocultural consequences of that fact—but who'd read a piece with an unsensational message like that? Women are surging forward educationally, entering the professions and the burgeoning service fields in great numbers, having children on their own, putting up with less crap from boyfriends and husbands—we all know that. Men are taking less than half the BAs, have suffered from the decline of manufacturing and other traditionally male jobs, and have lost some of their domestic privileges and some of their cultural prestige—we all know that too. It may even be, as Rosin claims, that women are particularly well suited to the postindustrial economy, where brains, self-discipline, the ability to work well with others and verbal skills matter more than brawn and testosterone-fueled thrill-seeking. It takes a clever picker of statistical and anecdotal cherries, though, to make plausible Rosin's claim that we are on the verge of becoming a matriarchy.

Take, for example, Rosin's opening vignette. In the 1970s, when flamboyant Marlboro Man biologist Ronald Ericsson figured out how to sort sperm to select a baby's sex, he assumed prospective parents would want boys and was criticized by some feminists for enabling this "universal" desire. Since the 1990s the decision has been made by the woman, and to Ericsson's surprise, the majority have gone for girls. "These mothers look at their lives," she writes, "and think their daughters will have a bright future their mother and grandmother didn't have, brighter than their sons, even, so why wouldn't you choose a girl?" Let's cheer that son-preference is on the wane in the United States (but note that a disturbing study shows that men are more likely to stay in a marriage when they have a son, and, as Echidne of the Snakes points out on her blog, a 2007 Gallup poll still gives boys the edge). But it is hardly "over" in South Korea, as Rosin claims; sex-selective abortion is still common there and may be increasing in China, India and Vietnam, as ultrasound becomes more available and prosperity rises. Furthermore, even if those countries' preference for boys vanishes forever while you are reading these words, they will be dealing with the female-unfriendly consequences—including the sale, kidnapping and enslavement of girls and women—for decades.

One problem with Rosin's optimistic picture is that every fact she cites in support needs about a dozen asterisks after it: women may be taking more than half of college degrees, for example, but both men and women are going to college in greater numbers than in previous decades; men still dominate in science, math, engineering and IT (where the good jobs are); women need a college degree to earn as much as a man with a high school diploma and, in any case, are sandbagged in the workforce by discrimination, as well as by childcare and eldercare responsibilities men are able, still, to slough off onto their wives or sisters. That women earn 20 to 30 percent less than men in nearly every occupation from sales-clerk to surgeon is not a detail, and suggests that gender reversal is hardly around the corner, no matter how well girls do in school. Similarly, I'm wary of reading too much into Rosin's interviews with Victoria, Erin and Michelle, sorority sisters at the University of Missouri, Kansas City. These young women are hopeful, organized and ambitious, and assume their lackadaisical boyfriends will be the ones who stay home with the kids. (That would indeed be a role reversal—right now, there are 158,000 stay-home dads, as against 5.1 million stay-home moms.) Great news—does that mean I can throw away my file of articles claiming that startling numbers of young, educated women just want to be homemakers? Or has Rosin, like Lisa Belkin before her, found interviewees who illustrate her preconceived ideas?

Must women's gain be men's loss? Rosin is no Christina Hoff Sommers—her villain isn't feminism but the impersonal workings of postindustrial capitalism, which have marginalized working-class men. But as her title suggests, she sees gender as a zero-sum game. Deprived of the economic superiority that was the basis of their dominance, men don't know what to do with themselves. As Kansas City teacher and social worker Mustafaa El Scari tells the down-and-out deadbeat dads in his fathering class, "All you are is a paycheck, and now you ain't even that. And if you try to exercise your authority, she'll call 911." Excuse me, exercise your authority? Are men really so brittle that they can't imagine a more fluid, flexible, loving, egalitarian way of relating to women and children than "because I said so"? Can they really not take advantage of the expansion of female-dominated working-class jobs like nursing and food preparation? (Actually, aren't most restaurant cooks already men? And if nursing sounds too girly, how about physician's assistant, EMS tech, phlebotomist?) Why should it be that women can change but men cannot?

Perhaps boys just haven't had enough incentive. The old ways worked so well for so long, so much of life was rigged in men's favor: all they had to do was show up. It can take a few generations for the new reality to sink in. Unfortunately, society at large isn't doing much to help. American males are bathed from birth in pop culture that reveres the most childish, most retrograde, most narcissistic male fantasies, from misogynistic rap to moronic action movies. Where would they get the idea that they should put away the video game and do their homework? That social work or schoolteaching is a good life for a man? Girls get a ton of sexist messages, too. But even if they grow up hating their bodies and dressing like prostitutes, they know that if they don't want to end up waitressing, they've got to hit the books and make a plan.

Hit the books. Make a plan. Boys can do that. ■

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OIL & ACCOUNTABILITY:

WHO WILL PAY TO FIX LOUISIANA?

OLIVER HOUCK

The British Petroleum blowout stripped the cover from one of the most cherished myths of Louisiana and other oil-producing states—that oil development and the environment coexist in happy harmony. Yet, as devastating as the blowout is—and we may never know the full extent—it pales in comparison with the damage the oil and gas industry has done to southern Louisiana, year in and year out, over nearly a century. President Obama alluded to this in his June 15 Oval Office address, when he called for a comprehensive effort to restore Louisiana's coast and wetlands. There is a bill to be paid here too, and it is enormous. The question is whether the State of Louisiana and the US Congress will ask oil and gas corporations to pony up their fair share—which puts Louisiana in a delicate position.

No state in the union has been more firmly wedded to the oil and gas industry than Louisiana. No more zealous preachers of the clean oil gospel can be found than the state's politicians, who were elected by oil money (at the high end of industry campaign funding) and have defended the industry from regulation (including wetland protections), reduced its royalties with tax breaks and "royalty holidays" (thereby depriving the US Treasury of some $53 billion in revenues from existing offshore leases) and beaten the drums for opening the Atlantic Coast and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil development… because Louisiana's experience showed oil and the environment to be so compatible. State brochures feature pelicans and oil platforms against the setting sun. The largest exhibit in New Orleans's Audubon Aquarium of the Americas contains the base of an oil rig, around which swim contented fish, framed by the logos of Shell, Chevron and BP. We have improved on Eden.

The real story was always otherwise; it was just rarely told. Oil was first found in Louisiana a hundred years ago, and the finds swiftly moved south to the coastal zone. Oil companies appropriated the coastal parishes, most notoriously Plaquemines, ground zero for the BP slick; Texaco's leases in Plaquemines were arranged by the parish district attorney, who conveniently reported only part of the proceeds to the parish police jury and kept the rest (a fact that is emerging only after his death, in a family feud). Local politicians in their pockets, Texaco et al. had one remaining problem: getting men and equipment to the drill sites and laying pipelines to carry off the gold. In the companies' way were some 5 million acres of coastal marsh, one of the most biologically productive zones in North America.

The solution was soon to come: floating dredges, which would dig canals to the wellheads and more canals for the pipelines. These dredges have worked nonstop ever since. They have ripped through the wetlands of southern Louisiana like bulldozers, severing bayous, drowning adjacent marshes, draining others and introducing salt water from the Gulf of Mexico that sears the plant roots, at which point they disintegrate and the coastal marsh system, made up of billions of stems and roots of living things, falls apart like wet cardboard. There were alternative means of access, but industry rejected them. It could also have backfilled the canals when the job was

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done, but this too was rejected. The reasons were remarkably like BP's: those approaches would take time, cost money.

The dredging was not occasional, or here or there. It was pandemic. The industry has laced 8,000 miles of canals and pipelines through the Louisiana wetlands, each one eroding laterally over time, less an assault at this point than a cancer. They are supported by larger navigation canals, requested by the industry and built by the ever-willing Army Corps of Engineers. One such canal, the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, after killing off 39,000 acres of forest and wetlands between New Orleans and the gulf, ushered Hurricane Katrina right into the city. If you drive down any bayou road in southern Louisiana, you will see marsh grasses out the window. If you fly over them in a plane and look down, you see something that looks like northern New Jersey: water roads and open water through isolated patches of green. The next time you fly over, there will be even less green. We have been losing twenty-five square miles of coastal Louisiana every year, in major part to these canals, to serve the oil and gas industry, which has made tidy sums in the bargain. When I last looked, six oil and energy corporations were listed in the world's top ten.

Well before the blowout, the industry had eaten a lion's share of the coast through processes few were aware of and nobody talked about.

With this understanding, we may return for the moment to the BP disaster. It is bad, particularly for local communities, and the long term is anyone's guess. We still do not know the full *Exxon Valdez* story, and that was in a more confined space, twenty-one years ago. Current estimates of the BP blowout dwarf the *Valdez* spill, which came in at 11 million gallons. Industry-wide, the figures are no more encouraging. Coast Guard records show 40 million gallons spilled in Louisiana waters over the past ten years from routine oil activity. Which amounts to a *Valdez*-class spill every three years. This news, like the canals, went unreported.

Now we have BP on the front pages and reported daily, as it should be. But the sad fact is that the ongoing destruction of the Louisiana coastal zone—by canal, by pipeline, by boat wakes, by the extraction of billions of gallons of subsurface oil, gas and brines—has done far more indelible damage, not only to the landscape but to a way of life that could be sustainable for generations beyond the future of oil down here. Well before the blowout, the oil industry had eaten a lion's share of the coast through processes few were aware of and nobody talked about. Plaquemines Parish has a legitimate beef with BP today as the oil globs come ashore. But the reason nearly half of Plaquemines has disappeared over the past fifty years is that the oil industry, writ large, destroyed it. No one said a word.

It was all part of the marriage. Required by federal law to operate a coastal zone permitting program, Louisiana issued oil and gas permits like orders at McDonald's: how many would you like today? State employees referred to the industry as their "clients"; members of the general public, and environmentalists in particular, were called "others." (Of course, behind closed doors the names were more graphic.) Their marching orders, like those of the Minerals Management Service later, were to keep the jubilee on track. In the early 1980s I did a study of Louisiana permits over a three-year period; several thousand issued, four denied—none for oil drilling. A New Orleans *Times-Picayune* reporter did an update covering the past five years and found 4,500 permits issued, none denied. Not even the precipitous collapse of the coastal zone—which had, belatedly, caught public attention—could change the attitude or the practice. Saving the coast is one thing, but requiring the oil industry to help save it is beyond local imagination. Louisiana, the state most vulnerable to climate change and sea level rise, leads the charge against EPA regulation of carbon dioxide (letters of opposition from no fewer than four state agencies and the governor, which must be a record) and the president's climate change bill.

The BP blowout has put Louisiana politics in a bind. "Drill, baby, drill" may be what Sarah Palin says, but it is what we do, more rampantly and with less restraint than any jurisdiction one would want to emulate. The reaction of Louisianans to the BP blowout has been to protect the industry and its longstanding commitment to what has turned out to be a very dirty (40 million gallons spilled per decade, in an uneventful decade), plainly unsustainable (it will run out, which is why, Palin and pundits to the contrary, the business has gone offshore) and deleterious relationship (disappeared wetlands do not reappear when you stop abusing them; at best they can be re-created in part, and at enormous expense). The blowback within Louisiana against President Obama's moratorium on deepwater drilling in the gulf has been ballistic, even from the coastal communities most at risk. They too, work on the rigs. We are all in this marriage together.

It is clear at this point that BP will pay for its blowout and all consequential damages only to the extent they can be proved. (It is doubtful we will ever know the impacts on sea life and the benthic floor, and few will be subject to dispositive proof.) The cap on BP's liability to private parties is likely to be lifted. A BP executive, probably one with direct supervision over the rig closure, may well go to jail. But in a couple of years this chapter will close. The next chapter will center on how coastal communities and the resources they depend on can survive. Who knows; the plumes may yet move east and deal Louisiana a nasty but glancing blow. When BP's bill is finally paid, however, there will be another one left that eclipses it. Federal and state officials are still struggling to come up with a plan to restore the southern Louisiana landscape. The price is rising, but high-end estimates put it near a mind-blowing $140 billion.

Oliver Houck's publications on the oil and gas industry and the Louisiana coastal zone include "Land Loss in Coastal Louisiana: Causes, Consequences and Remedies," Tulane Law Review (1983), and "Can We Save New Orleans?", Tulane Environmental Law Review (2006).

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You deserve a factual look at . . .

Israel: An Apartheid State?

Is there any truth at all in this oft-repeated calumny?

Only a short time ago, many universities, goaded by left-wing professors and students and their substantial Muslim student bodies, "celebrated" Israel Apartheid Week in which divestiture from, boycott of and sanctions against Israel were demanded. Is there any truth, any justification at all in this odious characterization?

What are the facts?

South African Apartheid. "Apartheid," the Dutch-Africaans term for separation, was the social order of the former South Africa. It meant exactly that. The Black majority of the nation and the so-called Colored were kept strictly apart in all aspects of life. White domination over the native population was mandatory. For instance: Non-Whites had to carry a "passbook." Passbook infringement could lead to deportation to one of the Bantu "homelands." Blacks and Coloreds were being kept from a wide array of jobs. Black-White sex was a serious jail-time criminal offense. Hospitals and ambulances were strictly separated. Whites enjoyed free education until graduation. Not so for Blacks, whose education was strictly limited by the oppressive "Bantu Education Act."

By law, no mixed sports were allowed. Park benches, swimming pools, libraries, and movies were strictly separated. Blacks were not allowed to purchase or imbibe alcoholic drinks – etc, etc, etc. And that is only a partial and small list of the many abusive impediments that non-Whites suffered under the South African apartheid regime.

> "To call Israel an apartheid state is an expression of ignorance, anti-Semitism, and malice."

Israeli Equality. To tar Israel with that kind of brush is utterly malicious. The exact opposite is the case. Not one single apartheid practice applies to Israel. Israel is by far the most racially mixed and tolerant nation in the entire Muslim Middle East. Arabs, who are about 20% of Israel's population, enjoy, without any exception, the same rights and opportunities in all fields as their Jewish fellow citizens. The total equality of all Israelis is assured in Israel's founding document. All non-Jews (which means primarily Muslim Arabs) have full voting rights. At present, eleven Arabs sit in Israel's Knesset (parliament): Three Arabs are deputy speakers. Arabs are represented in Israel's diplomatic service all over the world. Arab students may and do study in all Israeli universities. All children in Israel are entitled to subsidized education until graduation, without any restrictions based on color or religions. In short, Muslim Arabs and other non-Jews are allowed everything that Jews are allowed, everything that non-Whites were not allowed in apartheid South Africa.

But, yes, there is one difference: Jewish Israeli men are obligated to a three-year stint in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and serve in the reserve until they are 50 years old. For Arabs, this service is voluntary. Except for the Druze, hardly any Arabs volunteer to serve in the armed forces.

Israel has granted permanent residence and full citizen rights to a large number of legal and illegal foreign workers and their families – from the Philippines, Eritrea, Colombia, Nigeria, and from many other countries. Nobody, of course, is forced or requested to convert to Judaism as a condition of their being allowed to stay. Israel has accepted a shipload of Vietnamese refugees who had sought asylum. No Arab country has accepted a single one of those refugees. Israel has brought in about 70,000 black Ethiopian Jews, who despite their backwardness have become fully integrated citizens of Israel. Everything that Blacks were not allowed to do in South Africa is totally open to non-Jews in Israel.

The "Apartheid Wall." Another reason for which left-wing zealots and anti-Semites like to refer to Israel as the "apartheid state" is the fence between Israel proper and the territories. This fence (which is indeed a fence and not a wall over most of its length) was constructed at great cost in order to prevent the suicidal attacks that had killed hundreds of Israelis and grievously wounded thousands more. Thankfully, this "wall" is exceptionally successful and has totally prevented any such attacks since its completion. There is little question that this separation fence is the cause of inconvenience for some of the Arab population. But it is an annoyance that they have brought about themselves. And, of course, there are walls for protection all over the world. The Chinese invented it hundreds of years ago. Our own country has a long, high, very sophisticated wall across our border with Mexico. It is a wall, not to keep out criminals who want to kill Americans, but people who want to come here only in search of a better life. To call the Israeli fence an "apartheid wall" is an expression of ignorance and of malevolence.

Israel is a light unto the nations. It has, regrettably, many enemies – all or most of the world's Muslim nations and left-wing ideologues who mostly hate the United States and who consider Israel to be America's cat's-paw in the Middle East. The reality, of course, is that Israel is the exact opposite of an apartheid state. It is a country in which all residents, all citizens, enjoy the same full rights. All other countries in the Middle East are benighted theocracies, ruthless tyrannies, or mostly both. To call Israel an apartheid state is an expression of ignorance, anti-Semitism, and malice.

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Which has required Louisiana politicians to take a new tack.

For the past fifty years, as the findings of scientists were trickling in, documenting the relationship between oil canals and marsh loss (the graphs are linear: as the canals go in, the land disappears), the state simply denied them. Worse, those who reported their findings say they were demoted or canned, their work labeled extreme, inimical to Louisiana. We remained glued to the image of the pelican and oil rig in holy harmony. As the coastal losses became too apparent to ignore, however—roads were disappearing under high tides—it became clear that Louisiana was going to need major amounts of money. The state has been reluctant to tag the oil industry with the bill, however; after all, we are still married.

This, then, is the new pitch. It is hard to say with a straight face, but here goes: "OK, we have let oil and gas run rampant in our state, and it has wrecked our coastal zone, but, America, we did it all for you! Louisiana has sacrificed itself for the good of the nation. You all drive cars, don't you? So you ought to pay for fixing the harm." Of course, the good of the country was nowhere on Louisiana's radar; the state was pocketing revenue, and that was sufficient reason to kill the zone. The new pitch also affronts a principle of fairness in America that applies equally to giant corporations and the neighbor who borrows your lawn mower: you break it, you fix it. We do not ask taxpayers to repair coal extractor Massey Energy's damage to Appalachia or to abate emissions from chemical plants because we turn on the lights or buy Clorox. These damages belong in the cost of these products, and it is about time they got in there before the environment tanks because taking it is free.

These considerations have not deterred an unlikely coalition of industry and (a few) environmental groups from banding together in something called America's Wetland to help sell the pitch to Congress. The America's Wetland Foundation is funded by Louisiana industries associated with the oil business, overwhelmingly Shell. In short, the industry that has profited enormously from Louisiana while damaging it severely is now campaigning to have American taxpayers pick up the tab. The industry has spawned another initiative to assist, called America's Energy Coast. I do not think I need to describe its theme. The vehicle du jour is a Louisiana bill in Congress that diverts more public offshore royalties to the state. Louisiana gets more of the pie; the rest of America gets less. The oil and gas industry is, of course, fine with the proposal. It pays not a penny more for nearly a century of damage that has left the coast in shreds.

There is a better approach. We have three major actors here, each responsible for a catastrophic loss: the Army Corps of Engineers, which built the major levees and canals; the oil and gas industry, which, for private profit, laid down an even more extensive and damaging web; and the State of Louisiana, which promoted the first two to the hilt, silenced the critics and took its cut. Each, including industry, can now pay its share. We require the chemical industry to clean up old waste sites under Superfund; we ask the same of the coal industry under the Surface Mine Restoration Act. Billing the oil and gas industry for its damages would be nothing new. Then again, this is Louisiana, and we and oil remain faithfully married—at least until the industry leaves us, as it surely will after a few more heady years, with only the memories and a wasted skin. ■

A Hole in the World

The BP disaster reveals the risks in imagining that we have complete command over nature.

by NAOMI KLEIN

Everyone gathered for the town hall meeting had been repeatedly instructed to show civility to the gentlemen from BP and the federal government. These fine folks had made time in their busy schedules to come to a school gymnasium on a Tuesday night in Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana, one of many coastal communities where brown poison was slithering through the marshes, part of what has come to be described as the largest environmental disaster in US history.

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"Speak to others the way you would want to be spoken to," the chair of the meeting pleaded one last time before opening the floor for questions.

And for a while the crowd, mostly made up of fishing families, showed remarkable restraint. They listened patiently to Larry Thomas, a genial BP public relations flack, as he told them that he was committed to "doing better" to process their claims for lost revenue—then passed all the details off to a markedly less friendly subcontractor. They heard out the suit from the Environmental Protection Agency as he informed them that, contrary to what they had read about the lack of testing and the product being banned in Britain, the chemical dispersant being sprayed on the oil was really perfectly safe.

But patience started running out by the third time Ed Stanton, a Coast Guard captain, took to the podium to reassure them that "the Coast Guard intends to make sure that BP cleans it up."

Naomi Klein is a Nation *columnist. A version of this article appeared in the* Guardian.

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"Put it in writing!" someone shouted out. By now the air-conditioning had shut itself off and the coolers of Budweiser were running low. A shrimper named Matt O'Brien approached the mic. "We don't need to hear this anymore," he declared, hands on hips. It didn't matter what assurances they were offered because, he explained, "we just don't trust you guys!" And with that, such a loud cheer rose up from the bleachers you'd have thought the Oilers (the school's unfortunate name for its sports teams) had scored a touchdown.

The showdown was cathartic, if nothing else. For weeks residents had been subjected to a barrage of pep talks and extravagant promises coming from Washington, Houston and London. Every time they turned on their TVs, there was the BP boss, Tony Hayward, offering his solemn word that he would "make it right." Or else it was President Obama expressing his absolute confidence that his administration would "leave the Gulf Coast in better shape than it was before," that he was "making sure" it "comes back even stronger than it was before this crisis."

It all sounded great. But for people whose livelihoods put them in intimate contact with the delicate chemistry of the wetlands, it also sounded absurd. Once the oil coats the base of the marsh grass, as it had already done just a few miles away, no miracle machine or chemical concoction could safely get it out. You can skim oil off the surface of open water, and you can rake it off a sandy beach, but an oiled marsh just sits there, slowly dying. The larvae of countless species for which the marsh is a spawning ground—shrimp, crab, oysters and fin fish—will be poisoned.

It was already happening. Earlier that day, I traveled through nearby marshes in a shallow-water boat. Fish were jumping in waters encircled by white boom, the strips of thick cotton and mesh BP is using to soak up the oil. The circle of fouled material seemed to be tightening around the fish like a noose. Nearby, a red-winged blackbird perched atop a seven-foot blade of oil-contaminated marsh grass. Death was creeping up the cane; the small bird may as well have been standing on a lighted stick of dynamite.

And then there is the grass itself, or the Roseau cane, as the tall, sharp blades are called. If oil seeps deeply enough into the marsh, it will not only kill the grass above ground but also the roots. Those roots are what hold the marsh together, keeping bright-green land from collapsing into the Mississippi River Delta and the Gulf of Mexico. So not only do places like Plaquemines Parish stand to lose their fisheries, but also much of the physical barrier that lessens the intensity of fierce storms like Hurricane Katrina. Which could mean losing everything.

How long will it take for an ecosystem this ravaged to be "restored and made whole," as Obama's interior secretary pledged it would be? It's not at all clear that such a thing is even possible, at least not in a time frame we can easily wrap our heads around. The Alaskan fisheries have yet to recover fully from the 1989 *Exxon Valdez* spill, and some species of fish never returned. Government scientists estimate that as much as a *Valdez*-worth of oil may be entering the Gulf Coast waters every four days. An even worse prognosis emerges from the 1991 Gulf War spill, when an estimated 11 million barrels of oil were dumped into the Persian Gulf—the largest spill ever. It's not a perfect comparison, since so little cleanup was done, but according to a study conducted twelve years after the disaster in the Persian Gulf, nearly 90 percent of the impacted muddy salt marshes and mangroves were still profoundly damaged.

We do know this: far from being "made whole," the Gulf Coast, more than likely, will be diminished. Its rich waters and crowded skies will be less alive than they are today. The physical space many communities occupy on the map will also shrink, thanks to erosion. And the coast's legendary culture will contract and wither. The fishing families up and down the coast do not just gather food, after all. They hold up an intricate network that includes family tradition, cuisine, music, art and endangered languages—much like the roots of grass holding up the land in the marsh. Without fishing, these unique cultures lose their root system, the very ground on which they stand. (BP, for its part, is well aware of the limits of recovery. The company's "Gulf of Mexico Regional Oil Spill Response Plan" specifically instructs officials not to make "promises that property, ecology, or anything else will be restored to normal." Which is no doubt why its officials consistently favor folksy terms like "make it right.")

> 'You sit up here with a straight face and act like you know, when you don't know.'—gulf resident at a town hall with BP and government officials

If Katrina pulled back the curtain on racism, the BP disaster pulls back the curtain on something far more hidden: how little control even the most ingenious among us have over the awesome, intricately interconnected natural forces with which we so casually meddle. BP cannot plug the hole in the Earth that it made. Obama cannot order brown pelicans not to go extinct (no matter whose ass he kicks). No amount of money—not BP's recently pledged $20 billion, not $100 billion—can replace a culture that has lost its roots. And while our politicians and corporate leaders have yet to come to terms with these humbling truths, the people whose air, water and livelihoods have been contaminated are losing their illusions fast.

"Everything is dying," a woman said as the town hall meeting was coming to a close. "How can you honestly tell us that our gulf is resilient and will bounce back? Because not one of you up here has a hint as to what is going to happen to our gulf. You sit up here with a straight face and act like you know, when you don't know."

This Gulf Coast crisis is about many things—corruption, deregulation, the addiction to fossil fuels. But underneath it all, it's about this: our culture's dangerous claim to have such complete understanding and command over nature that we

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can radically manipulate and re-engineer it with minimal risk to the natural systems that sustain us. As the BP disaster has revealed, nature is never as predictable as the most sophisticated mathematical and geological models imagine. During recent Congressional testimony, Hayward said, "The best minds and the deepest expertise are being brought to bear" on the crisis, and that "with the possible exception of the space program in the 1960s, it is difficult to imagine the gathering of a larger, more technically proficient team in one place in peacetime." And yet, in the face of what geologist Jill Schneiderman has described as "Pandora's well," they are like the men at the front of that gymnasium: they act like they know, but they don't know.

BP's Mission Statement

In the arc of human history, the notion that nature is a machine for us to re-engineer at will is a relatively recent conceit. In her groundbreaking 1980 book *The Death of Nature*, environmental historian Carolyn Merchant reminded readers that until the 1600s, the Earth was alive, usually taking the form of a mother. Europeans—like indigenous people the world over—believed the planet to be a living organism, full of life-giving powers but also wrathful tempers. There were, for this reason, strong taboos against actions that would deform and desecrate "the mother," including mining.

The metaphor changed with the unlocking of some (but by no means all) of nature's mysteries during the Scientific Revolution of the 1600s. With nature now cast as a machine, devoid of mystery or divinity, its component parts could be dammed, extracted and remade with impunity. Nature still sometimes appeared as a woman, but one easily dominated and subdued. In 1623 Sir Francis Bacon best encapsulated the new ethos when he wrote in *De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum* that nature is to be "put in constraint, molded, and made as it were new by art and the hand of man."

Those words may as well have been BP's corporate mission statement. Boldly inhabiting what the company called "the energy frontier," it dabbled in synthesizing methane-producing microbes and announced that "a new area of investigation" would be geo-engineering. And it bragged that, at its Tiber prospect in the Gulf of Mexico, it had "the deepest well ever drilled by the oil and gas industry"—as deep under the ocean floor as jets fly overhead.

Imagining and preparing for what would happen if these experiments went wrong occupied precious little space in the corporate imagination. As we have all discovered, after the Deepwater Horizon rig exploded, the company had no systems in place to respond effectively. Explaining why it did not have even the ultimately unsuccessful containment dome waiting to be activated onshore, BP spokesman Steve Rinehart said, "I don't think anybody foresaw the circumstance that we're faced with now." Apparently, it "seemed inconceivable" that the blowout preventer would ever fail—so why prepare?

This refusal to contemplate failure clearly came straight from the top. A year ago Hayward told a group of graduate students at Stanford University that he has a plaque on his desk that reads, "If you knew you could not fail, what would you try?" Far from being a benign inspirational slogan, this is actually an accurate description of how BP and its competitors behave in the real world. In recent hearings on Capitol Hill, Congressman Ed Markey of Massachusetts grilled representatives from the top oil and gas companies on the ways they had allocated resources. Over three years, they had spent "$39 billion to explore for new oil and gas. Yet the average investment in research and development for safety, accident prevention and spill response was a paltry $20 million a year."

These priorities go a long way toward explaining why the "Initial Exploration Plan" BP submitted to the government for the ill-fated Deepwater Horizon well reads like a Greek tragedy about human hubris. The phrase "little risk" appears five times. Even if there is a spill, BP confidently predicts that, thanks to "proven equipment and technology," adverse effects will be minimal. Presenting nature as a predictable and agreeable junior partner (or perhaps subcontractor), the report cheerfully explains that should a spill occur, "Currents and microbial degradation would remove the oil from the water column or dilute the constituents to background levels." The effects on fish, meanwhile, "would likely be sublethal" because of "the capability of adult fish and shellfish to avoid a spill [and] to metabolise hydrocarbons." (In BP's telling, rather than a dire threat, a spill emerges as an all-you-can-eat buffet for aquatic life.)

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Best of all, should a major spill occur, there is apparently "little risk of contact or impact to the coastline" because of the company's projected speedy response (!) and "the distance [from the rig] to shore"—about forty-eight miles. This is the most astonishing claim of all. In a gulf that often sees winds of more than forty miles an hour, not to mention hurricanes, BP had so little respect for the ocean's capacity to ebb and flow, surge and heave, that it did not think oil could make a paltry forty-eight-mile trip. (In mid-June a shard of the exploded Deepwater Horizon showed up on a beach in Florida, 190 miles away.)

None of this sloppiness would have been possible, however, had BP not been making its predictions to a political class eager to believe that nature had indeed been mastered. Some, like Republican Lisa Murkowski, were more eager than others. The Alaska senator was so awe-struck by the industry's four-dimensional seismic imaging that she proclaimed deep-sea drilling to have reached the very height of controlled artificiality. "It's better than Disneyland in terms of how you can take technologies and go after a resource that is thousands of years old and do so in an environmentally sound way," she told the Senate Energy Committee just seven months ago.

Drilling without thinking has, of course, been Republican Party policy since May 2008. With gas prices soaring to

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unprecedented heights, conservative leader Newt Gingrich unveiled the slogan "Drill Here, Drill Now, Pay Less"—with an emphasis on the Now. The wildly popular campaign was a cry against caution, against study, against measured action. In Gingrich's telling, drilling at home wherever the oil and gas might be—locked in Rocky Mountain shale, in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge or deep offshore—was a surefire way to lower the price at the pump, create jobs and kick Arab ass all at once. In the face of this triple win, caring about the environment was for sissies: as Senator Mitch McConnell put it, "In Alabama and Mississippi and Louisiana and Texas, they think oil rigs are pretty." By the time the infamous "Drill, Baby, Drill" Republican National Convention rolled around, the party base was in such a frenzy for US-made fossil fuels, they would have bored under the convention floor if someone had brought a big enough drill.

Obama eventually gave in, as he invariably does. With cosmic bad timing, just three weeks before the Deepwater Horizon blew up, the president announced he would open up previously protected parts of the country to offshore drilling.

The response to the disaster—corporate and governmental—has been rife with the same arrogance that created it in the first place.

The practice was not as risky as he had thought, he explained. "Oil rigs today generally don't cause spills. They are technologically very advanced." That wasn't enough for Sarah Palin, who sneered at the Obama administration's plans to conduct more studies before drilling in some areas. "My goodness, folks, these areas have been studied to death," she told the Southern Republican Leadership Conference in New Orleans, just eleven days before the blowout. "Let's drill, baby, drill, not stall, baby, stall!" And there was much rejoicing.

In his Congressional testimony, Hayward said, "We and the entire industry will learn from this terrible event." And one might well imagine that a catastrophe of this magnitude would indeed instill in BP executives and the "Drill Now" crowd a new sense of humility. There are, however, no signs that this is the case. The response to the disaster—corporate and governmental—has been rife with precisely the brand of arrogance and overly sunny predictions that created the disaster in the first place.

The ocean is big; it can take it, we heard from Hayward in the early days, while spokesman John Curry insisted that hungry microbes would consume whatever oil was in the water system because "nature has a way of helping the situation." But nature has not been playing along. The deep-sea gusher has busted out all of BP's top hats, containment domes and junk shots. The ocean's winds and currents have made a mockery of the lightweight booms BP has laid out to absorb the oil. "We told them," says Byron Encalade, president of the Louisiana Oysters Association. "The oil's gonna go over the booms or underneath the bottom." Indeed it did. Marine biologist Rick Steiner, who has been following the cleanup closely, estimates that "70 percent or 80 percent of the booms are doing absolutely nothing at all."

And then there are the controversial chemical dispersants: more than 1.3 million gallons dumped with the company's trademark "What could go wrong?" attitude. As the angry residents at the Plaquemines Parish town hall pointed out, few tests had been conducted, and there is scant research about what this unprecedented amount of dispersed oil will do to marine life. Nor is there a way to clean up the toxic mixture of oil and chemicals below the surface. Yes, fast-multiplying microbes do devour underwater oil—but in the process they also absorb the water's oxygen, creating a new threat to marine life.

BP had even dared to imagine that it could prevent unflattering images of oil-covered beaches and birds from escaping the disaster zone. When I was on the water with a TV crew, for instance, we were approached by another boat, whose captain asked, "Y'all work for BP?" When we said no, the response—in the open ocean—was, "You can't be here then." But of course these heavy-handed tactics, like all the others, have failed. There is simply too much oil in too many places. "You cannot tell God's air where to flow and go, and you can't tell water where to flow and go," I was told by Debra Ramirez. It was a lesson she had learned from living in Mossville, Louisiana, surrounded by fourteen emissions-spewing petrochemical plants, and watching illness spread from neighbor to neighbor.

Human limitation has been the one constant of this catastrophe. After two months, we still have no idea how much oil is flowing or when it will stop. The company's claim that it will complete relief wells by the end of August—repeated by Obama in his June 15 Oval Office address—is seen by many scientists as a bluff. The procedure is risky and could fail, and there is a real possibility that the oil could continue to leak for years.

The flow of denial shows no sign of abating either. Louisiana politicians indignantly oppose Obama's temporary freeze on deepwater drilling, accusing him of killing the one big industry left standing now that fishing and tourism are in crisis. Palin mused on Facebook that "no human endeavor is ever without risk," while Texas Republican Congressman John Culberson described the disaster as a "statistical anomaly." By far the most sociopathic reaction, however, comes from veteran Washington commentator Llewellyn King: rather than turning away from big engineering risks, we should pause in "wonder that we can build machines so remarkable that they can lift the lid off the underworld."

Make the Bleeding Stop

Thankfully, many others are taking a different lesson from the disaster, standing not in wonder at humanity's power to reshape nature but at our powerlessness to cope with the fierce natural forces we unleash. There is something else, too. It is the feeling that the hole at the bottom of the ocean is more than an engineering accident or a broken machine. It is a violent wound in a living organism; it is part of us. And thanks to

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Dr. Peter Rodriguez is Associate Dean for International Affairs and Associate Professor at the Darden School of Business at the University of Virginia. He holds a Ph.D. in Economics from Princeton University. An expert in global macroeconomics and international business, Professor Rodriguez has taught for and worked with companies like Rolls Royce, Visa, and JPMorgan Chase.

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BP's live camera feed, we can all watch the Earth's guts gush forth, in real time, twenty-four hours a day.

John Wathen, a conservationist with the Waterkeeper Alliance, was one of the few independent observers to fly over the spill in the early days of the disaster. After filming the thick red streaks of oil that the Coast Guard politely refers to as "rainbow sheen," he observed what many had felt: "The gulf seems to be bleeding." This imagery comes up again and again. Monique Harden, an environmental rights lawyer in New Orleans, refuses to call the disaster an "oil spill" and instead says, "We are hemorrhaging." Others speak of the need to "make the bleeding stop." And I was personally struck, flying with the Coast Guard over the stretch of ocean where the Deepwater Horizon sank, that the swirling shapes the oil made in the ocean waves looked remarkably like cave drawings: a feathery lung gasping for air, eyes staring upward, a prehistoric bird. Messages from the deep.

This is surely the most surprising twist in the Gulf Coast saga: it seems to be waking us up to the reality that the Earth never was a machine. After 400 years of being declared dead, and in the middle of so much death, the Earth is coming alive.

The most positive outcome of this disaster would be not only a move to renewable energy but an embrace of the precautionary principle.

Following the oil's progress through the ecosystem offers a kind of crash course in deep ecology. Every day we learn more about how what seems to be a terrible problem in one part of the world radiates out in ways most of us could never have imagined. One day we learn that the oil could reach Cuba—then Europe. Next we hear that fishermen all the way up the Atlantic in Prince Edward Island, Canada, are worried because the bluefin tuna they catch are born thousands of miles away in those oil-stained gulf waters. And we learn, too, that for birds, the Gulf Coast wetlands are the equivalent of a busy airport hub—everyone seems to have a stopover: 110 species of migratory songbirds and 75 percent of all migratory US waterfowl.

It's one thing to be told by an incomprehensible chaos theorist that a butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil can set off a tornado in Texas. It's another to watch chaos theory unfold before your eyes. Carolyn Merchant puts the lesson like this: "The problem as BP has tragically and belatedly discovered is that nature as an active force cannot be so confined." Predictable outcomes are unusual within ecological systems, while "unpredictable, chaotic events [are] usual." Just in case we still didn't get it, a bolt of lightning recently struck a BP ship like an exclamation point, forcing it to temporarily suspend its containment efforts. And don't even mention what a hurricane will do to BP's toxic soup.

There is, it must be stressed, something perverse about this particular path to enlightenment. They say that Americans learn where foreign countries are by bombing them. Now it seems we are all learning about nature's circulatory systems by poisoning them.

In the late '90s an isolated indigenous group in Colombia captured world headlines with an almost *Avatar*-esque conflict. From their remote home in the Andean cloud forests, the U'wa let it be known that if Occidental Petroleum carried out plans to drill for oil on their territory, they would commit mass ritual suicide by jumping off a cliff. Their elders explained that oil is part of *ruiria*, "the blood of Mother Earth." They believe that all life, including their own, flows from *ruiria*, so pulling out the oil would bring on their destruction. (Oxy eventually withdrew from the region, saying there wasn't as much oil as it had previously thought.)

Virtually all indigenous cultures have myths about gods and spirits living in the natural world—in rocks, mountains, glaciers, forests—as did European culture before the Scientific Revolution. Katja Neves, an anthropologist at Concordia University, points out that the practice serves a practical purpose. Calling the Earth "sacred" is another way of expressing humility in the face of forces we do not fully comprehend. When something is sacred, it demands that we proceed with caution. Even awe.

If we are absorbing this lesson at long last, the implications could be profound. Public support for increased offshore drilling is down 22 percent from the peak of the "Drill Now" frenzy. The issue is not dead, however: it is only a matter of time before the Obama administration announces that, thanks to ingenious new technology and tough new regulations, it is perfectly safe to drill in the deep sea, even in the Arctic, where an under-ice cleanup would be infinitely more complex than the one under way in the gulf. But perhaps this time we won't be so easily reassured, so quick to gamble with the few remaining protected havens.

The same goes for geo-engineering. As climate change negotiations wear on, we should be ready to hear more from Steven Koonin, Obama's under secretary of energy for science. He is one of the leading proponents of the idea that climate change can be combated with techno tricks like releasing sulfate and aluminum particles into the atmosphere—and of course it's all perfectly safe, just like Disneyland! He also happens to be BP's former chief scientist, the man who just fifteen months ago was overseeing the technology behind BP's supposedly safe charge into deepwater drilling. Maybe this time we will opt not to let the good doctor experiment with the physics and chemistry of the Earth and choose instead to reduce our consumption and shift to renewable energies, which have the virtue that, when they fail, they fail small. As comedian Bill Maher put it, "You know what happens when windmills collapse into the sea? A splash."

The most positive possible outcome of this disaster would be not only an acceleration of renewable energy sources like wind but a full embrace of the precautionary principle of science. The mirror opposite of Hayward's "If you knew you could not fail" credo, the precautionary principle holds that "when an activity raises threats of harm to the environment or human health" we tread carefully, as if failure were possible, even likely. Perhaps we can even get Hayward a new desk plaque to contemplate as he signs compensation checks. "You act like you know, but you don't know." ■

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US Hikers Were Seized in Iraq

After Iranian forces crossed the border to arrest Americans, a rogue officer took over custody.

by BABAK SARFARAZ

Kurdistan province, Iran

Since their arrest last July by Iranian forces near the Iraq border, three Americans—Shane Bauer, Josh Fattal and Sarah Shourd—have been at the center of a high-stakes diplomatic struggle between Tehran and Washington. Iranian authorities have repeatedly accused the three of entering Iran to conduct espionage.

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Meanwhile, friends and family of the three, along with the State Department, the Committee to Protect Journalists and this magazine [Bauer has written for *The Nation*; see "Iraq's New Death Squad," June 22, 2009], have rejected the spying charge and suggested that the Americans accidentally crossed the border while on a recreational hike. Despite a well-publicized visit by the detainees' mothers in May, Iran has released little information about the circumstances of their arrest or the status of their case.

Now a five-month investigation by *The Nation* and the Investigative Fund at The Nation Institute has located two witnesses to the arrest who claim that Bauer, Fattal and Shourd were on Iraqi territory when they were arrested—not in Iran, as Iranian officials have asserted. Two additional sources report that the Revolutionary Guards officer who likely ordered their detention has since been arrested on charges of smuggling, kidnapping and murder.

The witnesses are residents of a Kurdish village in Iraq called Zalem, which lies a few miles from the Iran border; they declined to be identified, fearing retaliation from Iranian forces, who have been known to conduct missions across the border. The witnesses separately reported noticing the three Americans as they hiked up a mountain in the scenic Khormal region, which straddles the border. Part of the mountain lies in Iraq and part in Iran, but except for a few watchtowers and occasional signposts, the border here is largely unmarked, although local residents are familiar with its boundaries.

The witnesses, who followed the Western-looking hikers out of curiosity, say that around 2 PM on July 31, as the hikers descended the mountain, uniformed guards from NAJA, Iran's national police force, waved the hikers toward the Iranian side using "threatening" and "menacing" gestures. When their calls were ignored, one officer fired a round into the air. As the hikers continued to hesitate, the guards walked a few yards into Iraqi territory, where they lack jurisdiction, and apprehended them.

These witness accounts corroborate a statement Bauer made on May 20 during a televised reunion at a Tehran hotel between the hikers and their mothers. As the *New York Times* reported, Bauer "denied that they had walked into Iran, as they were accused of doing, before stopping himself and saying, 'We can't really talk about that.'"

Farhad Lohoni, a local tribal leader, had previously claimed that the American hikers had been snatched from Iraq in a cross-border raid by Iranian agents, as reported in the *Daily Telegraph* in August 2009. Lohoni said that his relatives had seen a group of men cross the border into Iraq, and he told the *Telegraph* that the hikers "were targeted and captured by a group that came over from Iran, ignoring Iraq's sovereignty. We know this and it means that Iran must have wanted to take Americans hostage at this sensitive time."

A State Department spokesman said that he had been unaware of evidence that the three were arrested in Iraqi territory but would not comment further.

Once captured, Bauer, Fattal and Shourd were sped by car to the local headquarters of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Marivan, a town close to the border in the province of Kurdistan. When they arrived, according to two sources, the Americans were remanded into the custody of Lt. Col. Heyva Taab, then head of the Revolutionary Guards' intelligence unit in the region. According to these sources—a former member of the Revolutionary Guards and an official who serves in the provincial government at Sanandaj—only Taab would have had the authority to order the Americans' detention and eventual transfer to Tehran. A branch of the Iranian military with at least 125,000 personnel, the Revolutionary Guards are responsible for maintaining national security throughout the Islamic Republic.

"When I heard the news that they had arrested American hikers, I immediately thought, This is the work of the intelligence arm of the Revolutionary Guards, because they have people in this region," says Idris Ahmedi, an Iranian Kurdish exile and a regional expert who is a visiting scholar at Georgetown University. "I thought they were most likely lured into Iranian Kurdistan, where they could arrest them. It is consistent with Iran's past actions."

Less than a month later, in late August 2009, Taab himself was arrested and charged with the July 6 murder of the son of Mostafa Shirzadi, the Imam Joma (Friday prayer leader) of Marivan, an influential cleric in the region. Shirzadi's nephew was also allegedly killed by Taab. Since his arrest Taab has been implicated in a vast criminal enterprise encompassing a profitable smuggling

Babak Sarfaraz, who has covered Iran's democracy movement for the magazine, is a pseudonym for a journalist in Iran. This article was reported in collaboration with the Investigative Fund at The Nation Institute. Naseh Afrani, also a pseudonym, contributed reporting from Kurdistan province, and Nicholas Jahr contributed reporting from New York.

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operation and dozens of murders, rapes and kidnappings. According to the Sanandaj official, numerous lawsuits, perhaps hundreds, have been filed against Taab in Kurdistan, alleging libel, theft, rape, kidnapping and murder. Taab's case has twice been before a judge, and he awaits execution in a Tehran prison.

Although the state-run Iranian press has not reported on Taab's crimes, they were made public in a series of articles in January and February by a Kurdish news site, *Kurdistan Va Kurdnews*, run by the Kurdistan Democratic Party. A February 17 article describes Taab as the head of a "criminal band" and reports that Taab and seven accomplices were under arrest by the Revolutionary Guards for their role in a vast number of illegal killings.

Several sources describe Taab as the central power in Kurdistan province. According to locals and experts, control of the border lies in the hands of the Revolutionary Guards, in particular their intelligence unit, Etelaat Sepah, whose local division had been commanded by Taab for about five years. "At this point it's really the Sepah, the Revolutionary Guards, that are in charge, especially in the western provinces, especially because the Americans are on the other side, in Iraq," says Kaveh Ehsani, an assistant professor of international studies at DePaul University and an Iran expert who serves as a contributing editor to the journal *Middle East Report*. "On the surface the security force [NAJA] is in charge, but it really is the Revolutionary Guards that control the borders."

It is a region where, according to several Iran experts, smuggling and cross-border traffic are routine. The Iraq-Iran border is "relatively porous because it's mountainous," says Faraz Sanei, an Iran researcher at Human Rights Watch, which issued a report last year on political freedom in Iranian Kurdistan. Sanei describes the border as a common escape route for dissidents—journalists, human rights advocates and Iranian Kurds—as well as a commonly used trade route for goods. "Smuggling is something that has taken place and continues to take place there, whether it be of goods or of humans across the border. It's something that happens quite often."

Soon after Taab took charge of the Sepah in the northwestern quadrant of Kurdistan, he began to enrich himself off the black-market border economy. According to the Sanandaj official and the former Revolutionary Guards officer, who had firsthand knowledge of Taab's activities, Taab's first scheme involved selling merchandise confiscated from petty smugglers, known as *koolbars*, who traffic consumer goods across the border (a trade depicted in the Iranian film *A Time for Drunken Horses*, which won the Caméra d'Or at Cannes in 2000).

The region is also home to a variety of Kurdish nationalist groups that have been demanding autonomy from the central Tehran government. One of these, the Party for Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK), is affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, a Kurdish separatist organization that engages in armed conflict within Turkey and has been labeled a terrorist organization by the United States and other governments. Since 2005 PJAK, based in the mountains in Kurdish Iraq, has been in open conflict with Tehran and has claimed responsibility for killing dozens of Revolutionary Guards soldiers in cross-border raids on Iranian military bases, as well as for the February 2007 downing of an Iranian military helicopter by a shoulder-launched missile in Khoy, in Western Azerbaijan province, which killed thirteen Iranian soldiers.

It has been speculated that some of these Kurdish militants enjoy US support. In April 2006, Representative Dennis Kucinich wrote a letter to President Bush questioning whether the US government was "fomenting opposition and supporting military operations in Iran among insurgent groups and Iranian ethnic minority groups, some of whom are operating from Iraq." Kucinich named two groups, including PJAK. In November of that year, Seymour Hersh reported in *The New Yorker* that "Israel and the United States have also been working together in support of a Kurdish resistance group known as the Party for Free Life in Kurdistan," and that a government consultant told him that the Israeli government had provided "equipment and training" to PJAK.

The United States and Israel have denied any involvement with PJAK. Still, these allegations of support have gained substantial traction inside Iran and may have undergirded Taab's decision to detain Bauer, Fattal and Shourd as well as the repeated public charges of espionage against the three. In early April, for instance, Iranian Intelligence Minister Heydar Moslehi told Iran's Press TV that "it is quite obvious to us that the three Americans arrested in Iran last year had links with Western and Israeli intelligence services."

Lt. Col. Heyva Taab, the officer who ordered the hikers' detention, has since been arrested on charges of smuggling, kidnapping and murder.

The Iranian government has retaliated against rising Kurdish militancy by launching a counteroffensive on PJAK, inside Iran and across the border in Iraq. In August 2007, for example, Iranian soldiers crossed into Iraq and attacked several villages, McClatchy reported. Most recently, on June 4, officials in Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdish region alleged that "a small unit of Iranian soldiers," including a tank and several other vehicles, had penetrated more than a mile into Iraqi Kurdistan's Arbil province in search of Kurdish rebels.

Until his arrest, Taab was a key player in Iran's counteroffensive. The former Revolutionary Guards officer says that several current members of the Guards told him that Taab's stated goal was to "completely wipe out PJAK" in his jurisdiction. According to Ahmedi, the scholar at Georgetown, Taab was involved in recent cross-border assassinations of Iranian Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Kurdish weekly *Awena* reported that Taab and his unit assassinated two Kurds on December 15, 2008.

According to the former officer and the Sanandaj official, Taab's criminal enterprise grew beyond smuggling in 2007, when he made his first forays into murder. *Koolbars*, the petty border smugglers, are often killed by land mines or fatally shot by border police. So Taab concocted a scheme to kidnap *koolbars*

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as well as ordinary unemployed Iranian Kurdish civilians, dress them in the uniforms of PJAK insurgents and then kill them—claiming they'd died in a military clash—in order to collect a bounty, as high as $40,000 a head, from his superiors in the Revolutionary Guards. He was assisted in this plot by at least nine others, seven of whom have been apprehended. The article in *Kurdistan Va Kurdnews* named all seven, including Haji Majid Muqimiyan of Kermansha, identified as a ringleader.

PJAK has officially denied involvement in these border clashes, including in a May 3, 2009, post to the Iranian website Tabnak, which is published by Mohsen Rezai, a former head of the Revolutionary Guards. Many of the PJAK clashes may, in fact, have been "bogus," said the Sanandaj official. "More or less no clashes with PJAK have been reported in the area since Heyva Taab and his gang were busted."

A mother of one *koolbar* tearfully described her son's disappearance. She said he went missing the same day in early 2009 that the government later claimed a clash with PJAK had taken place. The woman, a resident of a border town in Iranian Kurdistan, is a plaintiff in one of the lawsuits against Taab; she asked that her name and location not be mentioned, for fear that it would harm her case in court.

Taab's scheme was wildly successful, according to the Sanandaj official, who said one bank account under Taab's name has had nearly $6 million deposited in it since 2008. This macabre scheme ended only in the spring of 2009, when Taab killed a local official's brother who was seeking work in the area and, more decisively, last July when he killed the cleric's son.

On June 11 Mohammad Javad Larijani, secretary general of Iran's High Council for Human Rights, said that the government's investigation was nearly complete and a trial for Bauer, Fattal and Shourd "should not be very far from now." In a statement issued on June 17, the mothers of the hikers called on Iran either to prosecute or release their children. "Iran has no legitimate reason at this stage not to release them or move forward with a fair trial in which our children can openly answer any allegations against them."

"These new revelations, if indeed true, show the hikers have been victims of political machinations and manipulation," said Hadi Ghaemi, executive director of the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran. "The fact that they have been held for so long without prosecution strongly supports this trend. Under Iranian laws, they have committed no crime and should be released immediately. Their Iranian lawyer, who has studied the judicial files against them, has consistently maintained the only charge against them is illegal entry, which is subject to a fine and not arbitrary detention for so long. With this new information, even that charge appears fabricated, and there is no basis for holding them."

As of the press date, Shane Bauer, Josh Fattal and Sarah Shourd have been detained by Iran for ten months and twenty-three days. ■

Exchange

(continued from page 2)

method wrong. Her primary concern is not "the conflict between the creative individual and the hostile mass": she sees the masses (insofar as they are unreflecting) as inconsequential "ballast." In *The Fountainhead* she portrays what it means to be a first-handed valuer, as in the character of her hero, Howard Roark.

Nor is Rand's primary literary concern the conflict between producers and moochers, good or bad: she saw evil moochers as powerless on their own. In *Atlas Shrugged* the drama centers on how the conflicted premises of heroes like Dagny Taggart and Hank Rearden unwittingly aid their would-be destroyers, and how that is resolved.

Rather than rely on the soul of malice who penned this screed, or take at face value "biographers" who neither understand nor care to understand her philosophy, readers should read Ayn Rand and decide for themselves what she's all about.

Tym Parsons

Robin Replies

Brooklyn, N.Y.

I'm afraid Harry Binswanger and Tym Parsons haven't read me—or Rand, for that matter—very carefully. I did not claim that Rand's belief in Rachmaninoff's superiority called her ideas into question; I suggested that it called her taste into question. I did not claim or suggest that "Rand and Hitler are the same." I said that there are "similarities between the moral syntax of Randianism and of fascism," which is quite a different point.

I did not claim that Rand saw A is A as the premise "for some Rationalist deduction." But Binswanger errs even further when he says that Rand believed A is A was merely one of several "methods of inference and norms of cognition." As Rand wrote in *For the New Intellectual*: "That there is only one reality, the one which man perceives—that it exists as an objective absolute (which means: independently of the consciousness, the wishes or the feelings of any perceiver)—that the task of man's consciousness is to perceive, not to create, reality—that abstractions are man's method of integrating his sensory material—that man's mind is his only tool of knowledge—that A is A." More than a statement of epistemological best practices, A is A was meant to be taken as the summation, the climax, of Rand's metaphysical credo.

As for consulting "the best" literature on Rand, I did read Tara Smith's enormously helpful *Ayn Rand's Normative Ethics*, which brings me to Parsons. He says Rand is philosophically significant because the Ayn Rand Society, on whose steering committee Smith sits, is an affiliate of the American Philosophical Association. Yet the APA explicitly disavows any such affiliation on its website. Were Parsons to attend a meeting of the APA, however, he would learn of a great many philosophers—Philippa Foot, Alasdair MacIntyre, John Finnis and Rosalind Hursthouse, to name a few—who offer an alternative to Kant and Nietzsche.

Parsons also wonders why, if I believe that "Rand's success explains itself," I seek to explain "her to us." The answer, of course, is that there is a difference between Rand's success and her arguments, even if her followers conflate the two. As for Parsons's claim that Rand's concern is not "the conflict between the creative individual and the hostile mass" (a statement I actually challenge in my article), here is Rand herself: "All achievement and progress has been accomplished, not just by men of ability and certainly not by groups of men, but by a struggle between man and mob."

Since Parsons seems so interested in my psyche, let me close with a confession. If there is one reaction I have to Rand and her followers, it is a sense of embarrassment for men and women who peddle so much ignorance with such great confidence.

Corey Robin

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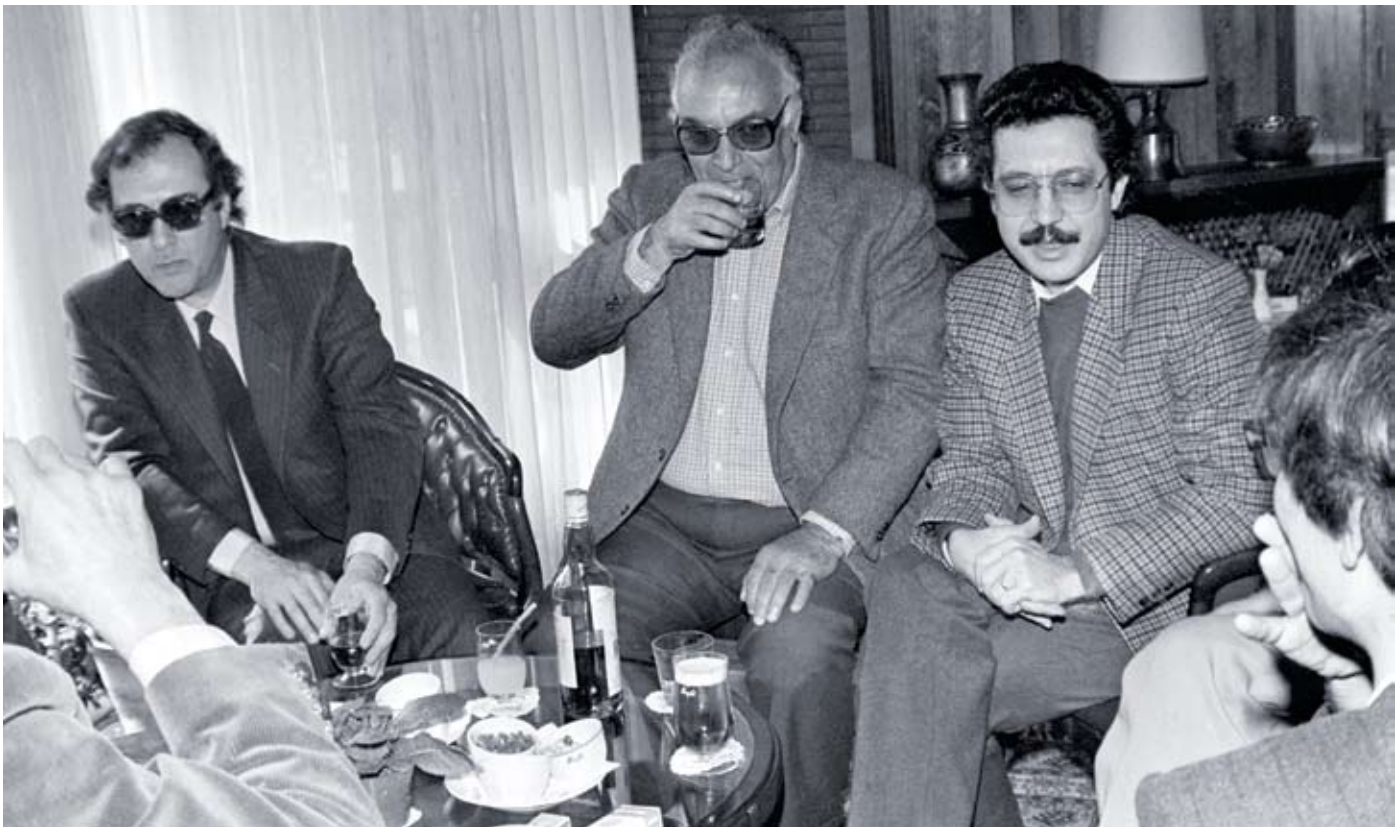
Books & the Arts.



AP

British playwright Harold Pinter, Yashar Kemal and Turkish musician Zülfü Livaneli (from left) in Istanbul, 1985

As Big as Mount Ararat

by MARC EDWARD HOFFMAN

"You son of a bitch, you're a traitor, trying to buy me out with American money! There's no way I'll leave the Workers' Party. Get the fuck out of here, and don't speak to me ever again!" He waves his arm dismissively, with a hint of menace, his one eye pinched in such theatrical disgust that for an instant it resembles the shriveled, sunken flesh that fills the socket beside it. Then a sliver of silence. He sits there, still and staring, trying to gauge my reaction. Suddenly Yashar Kemal erupts in laughter. Full-throated, full-bodied, convulsive laughter. Now his eye is wide and shining. Forty years on, rebuffing an invitation to fortune and fame in the United States strikes Turkey's greatest novelist as nothing short of hilarious.

Marc Edward Hoffman is an American writer based in Istanbul.

Kemal and I are sitting in his Istanbul apartment, watching the sun set across the Bosphorus, and he's recalling how, in the 1960s, a CIA agent—who till then had been a friend—suggested that his books might be more popular in the United States if he quit the Turkish Workers' Party, a Marxist organization for which he was the leading propagandist. As his re-enactment indicates, Kemal took offense at the suggestion, and huffily refused. The agent says that he never meant to dictate Kemal's politics. Indeed, he doesn't recall the incident at all, and seems genuinely dismayed at the author's recollection of events. (There's no denying that Kemal is a raconteur.) But the stubborn fact is that, for whatever reason, Kemal has never gotten the kind of recognition in the New World that he has in the Old, where for several decades he was considered a front-runner for the Nobel Prize.

Nowadays Kemal has largely been forgotten, at least in the West, where he's been eclipsed by Orhan Pamuk. When Pamuk received the Nobel in 2006, the Swedish Academy hailed him for transforming Istanbul into "an indispensable literary territory, equal to Dostoyevsky's St. Petersburg, Joyce's Dublin, or Proust's Paris." That's a fair judgment, but the same could be said for Kemal's portrayal of the Cukurova plains, where most of his works are set, and which critics have rightly compared to William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County and Gabriel García Márquez's Macondo. Many Turks argue that Pamuk benefited from a stroke of luck, or rather a gust of political correctness, when the academy honored him as a rebuke to the Turkish government for putting him on trial the year before, on charges of "publicly denigrating Turkish identity," after he'd referred to the massacre of "30,000 Kurds and 1 million Armenians" in an interview with

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Das Magazin. That, too, is a fair point, but many other writers—including Kemal—have been prosecuted under the Turkish penal code for their impolitic statements about Kurds or Armenians. But none of those writers drew attention to themselves, as Pamuk did, by falsely boasting, "almost nobody [else] dares mention it."

If Pamuk is Turkish literature's face—or at least the face that it turns to the West, and that the West finds most flattering—then Kemal is Turkish literature's heart and conscience. While Pamuk may speak for members of Istanbul's urbane, secular elite, it is not at all clear that they, as a class, speak for the whole of Turkey. Indeed, the country's past several election cycles would seem to indicate otherwise: it's the pious arrivistes who are in charge. To really understand Turkey, one must try to understand them. And while Yashar Kemal doesn't speak on their behalf—he is, after all, a communist, and religion plays little role in his novels—he at least writes about the social circumstances in which they, or rather their constituency, have toiled and grown. Grounded in the soil of rural, south-central Turkey, where Kemal was born and raised, his greatest novels, such as his classic, *Mehmed, My Hawk* (1955), focus on peasants' and former nomads' struggles to adapt to a changing world. Writing in an epic, almost mythic mode, with characters and themes derived from folk tales and the songs of Anatolian bards—but with an attention to physical detail and social relations that recalls Tolstoy—Kemal depicts the profound disruption of village life brought on by mechanization, market economics and the wholesale transformation of the countryside. His *oeuvre* traces Turkey's remarkable evolution over the past century from a multiethnic, polyglot, post-Ottoman rump state—one without a clear identity or natural cohesion—into a modern, if still rather disunited, nation.

The amazing continuity of Cukurova's outlaw tradition is not lost on Yashar Kemal.

The man who would come to be known as Yashar Kemal was born Kemal Sadik Gökceli in Hemite, a village in Cukurova ("the hollow plain"), one of Turkey's most fertile agricultural regions, probably in 1923—the year of the republic's founding. (It's impossible to know the exact date of his birth because there's no record. To this day, many births in the Turkish countryside go unrecorded.) His parents were Kurds who had fled eastern Anatolia, where they were landowners, during the region's occupation by the Russian army in 1915. His father's uncle was the last chief of the Luvan tribe; by the standards of the time and place, his family was wealthy. The village where they settled consisted of about sixty houses, simple adobe structures with thatched roofs and dirt floors packed and covered with kilims. The other residents of the village were descendants of Turkoman nomads who had been settled there in 1865 after their rebellion was crushed by the Ottoman state. Nevertheless, Kemal never felt out of place. He was more fluent in Turkish than Kurdish, and knew nothing of his parents' culture but songs and epics. The other villagers "didn't make any distinction between us and them," he told Alain Bosquet, the French poet, "and they never saw our difference as a stigma." (Bosquet and Kemal's correspondence, collected in *Yasar Kemal on His Life and Art*, translated from the French by Eugene Lyons Hébert and Barry Tharaud and published in 1999, constitutes the closest thing in English to a biography of Kemal.)

All the men on his mother's side of the family had been bandits and outlaws. Few "died in bed of old age," Kemal writes. "Except for her father, all died violently by bullets." His mother was "more than a little proud" of that fact and boasted of it often. As a result, Kemal developed a romantic attachment to the type. He was especially taken with the story of his Uncle Mahiro, "the most famous outlaw in eastern Anatolia, Iran and the Caucasus," whose corpse, it was said, was found to contain four hearts—such was his bravery. Epic songs were soon celebrating Mahiro as a folk hero and people's champion. Years later, echoes of them would appear in Kemal's novels.

On Kemal's third or fourth birthday, one of his uncles was gutting a sheep that had been sacrificed to celebrate the occasion and lost control of the knife. It slashed Kemal across the brow and cut deeply into his right eye, which had to be removed. About a year later, he was praying with his father in the village mosque when Yusuf, his adopted brother—who was older and, apparently, insanely jealous—stormed in and fatally stabbed his father through the heart. Afterward, Kemal's mother grew obsessed with vengeance. For years she insisted that Kemal kill Yusuf, playing upon his sense of filial piety and family honor. He refused repeatedly, to her great disappointment.

The profligate spending of Kemal's paternal uncle soon exhausted the family's wealth. "By the time I was eight years old," Kemal writes, "the splendors of the past were only distant memories, and my family was among the poorest in the village." Nevertheless, his childhood was "indescribably rich. Every creature in nature, every color, every smell, drove me wild with joy, as if I were in ecstasy." Kemal took equal delight in the region's cultural riches. "My childhood playground was a field full of ruins that dated to antiquity," he writes. Even his humble little village's spring was "decorated by a stele with Hittite inscriptions," in which a long-dead king boasted of subduing bandits in the region. The amazing continuity of Cukurova's outlaw tradition is not lost on Kemal. Neither are its innumerable other layers of cultural sedimentation. He delights in recounting all the civilizations and historical personages that have passed through Cukurova—or as Homer knew it, Cilicia—from ancient times, through the birth of Christianity, to the Ottoman era and after.

Besides the bounties of nature and the remnants of ruined civilizations, Kemal fell in love with the ancient—but at that time still vigorous—tradition of epic poetry and song. The region surrounding Hemite was "one of the areas where the Turkish language attains its greatest wealth," he writes. "There, every woman is a poet, and a local woman who can't compose an elegy is considered deficient or retarded. One couldn't conceive of things being otherwise." Likewise, "it was impossible that a man or a woman of this region would not have known at least one poem by Karacaoglan," the sixteenth-century bard who hailed from the region. "Those who didn't know any were considered simpleminded." Following in Karacaoglan's path were "hundreds of poets and singers of epic songs" who "wandered the Cukurova plain" down to Kemal's day. Kemal was as attracted to them as he was to the heroes of whom they sang, and when he was 8 he began to compose his own poems. Soon his ballads "were on everyone's lips. Everywhere I was 'Asik Kemal'—'Kemal the Bard.'"

If native curiosity and place of birth led Kemal to appreciate culture's depths, it was petty commerce that introduced him to culture's breadth and communicability. One day a peddler came to Kemal's village, selling goods on credit. In order to keep track of his debits, the merchant recorded them in a notebook. That was Kemal's first en-

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counter with writing. He was intrigued but didn't think much of it till some weeks later, when the police killed a local brigand who had been one of his father's bodyguards. Kemal composed an elegy and sang it for his mother. She had discouraged his hobby as unbefitting his lineage; but on this occasion she praised him. Her plaudits proved fleeting, however, for on the next day Kemal was distraught to realize that he'd forgotten his composition. He resolved immediately to learn writing.

In 1941 or thereabouts (again, the date is impossible to pin down) Kemal abandoned his formal studies—he was one year shy of completing middle school—and found a job in the library in the city of Adana. The arrangement suited him fine. The library was never crowded, so he could read throughout the day, and the manager let him stay at night and continue reading for as long as he wanted. The shelves were well stocked, since the government of Ismet Inönü had just established a committee for the translation of world literature, which was publishing volumes at a furious pace. "I became a book worm and devoured everything," Kemal writes, "Homer, the Greek classics and the classics of the nineteenth century." He was especially taken with Stendhal, Cervantes and Chekhov, whom he considers his "master."

Kemal soon fell in with communist circles in Adana. He began reading everything about the ideology he could find—which, as it turned out, wasn't all that much. Practically everything had been forbidden, so works circulated from hand to hand, often in the form of typed copies; and some of Marx's seminal works weren't available at all. "Under these conditions," he writes, "socialism came to us by means of the oral tradition—from master to apprentice. During this apprenticeship we learned many erroneous notions."

It isn't clear what those errors consisted of, exactly. I asked Kemal to clarify, and he disowned the statement. But it's obvious that his brand of Marxism is highly unorthodox. Such idiosyncrasy is typical of Turkey, where communism has often been more of a romantic than a systematic creed, with Marx's tenets emphasized, rejected or blithely ignored, according to taste or conscience. Even so, in Kemal's case the romanticism and selectivity are acute. The subjects of collectivism, economics and class conflict don't quicken his pulse. And though he sometimes talks about capitalism bringing an end to the feudal order in Cukurova, he isn't particularly interested in Marx's historical or sociological schemata; he's just weaving Marxist terminology into his own observations of the countryside. Indeed, he rejects outright Marx's argument that capitalism is a necessary stage of development; for him it's "a wilderness we can do without." In his mind, communism is all about "freedom of thought and…the liberation of the individual." He rejects violence of any kind: people shouldn't be killed, he tells me, "even if they're capitalists."

Kemal hardly dipped into Marxist literary theory during his long spells of reading in Adana, nor did he think it right to let politics dictate art. It was morally and aesthetically wrong, he writes, to distort "the novel even for a just cause." Kemal's cool attitude toward Marxist prescriptions allowed him to nurse grand literary ambitions: namely, "to create a new kind of narrative, beginning with a whole new language." If Turkey had anything to offer world culture, he writes, it was the fact that the peoples of Anatolia "were still living with freshness and intensity the oral traditions that had been forgotten in the West." He wanted to find some way to tap those traditions and rework them for the modern novel, in order to address contemporary issues in a timeless way. (This is the converse of Pamuk's approach, which is to address the timeless—and frankly banal—question of whether Turkey is Western or Eastern in brazenly contemporary ways. To be fair, Pamuk's approach is sometimes brilliantly inventive, as in *The Black Book*, from 1990, in which he employs Joycean puns and puzzles, as well as riffs on dervish esoterica, to turn an otherwise pedestrian mystery tale into a meditation on identity.) The problem for Kemal wasn't only figuring out how to make a literature of metric declamation work in prose, on the page; it was that the written language was impoverished, conservative and closed to change.

During the Ottoman period, Anatolia had been a world apart. Despite its geographic centrality within the empire, it was culturally marginal. Its rich dialect and oral literature

Fragments

When dawn, wearing golden sandals, awoke me,
I began to crawl, burning, shivering, to my uncurtained window;
Migrating birds streamed over the dark sea.

Who can quench the ingenious fires of cruelty?
I was dreaming of white-fetlocked horses conferring in a meadow
When dawn, wearing golden sandals, awoke me.

On my stopped loom, a sort of landscape: icy
Peaks, serrated as daggers; a corpse, and beside it a crow,
And migrating birds streaming over the dark sea.

Fat, autumnal flies alight on my sheets, rainbow-hued, dizzy;
This one on my wrist—its mandibles quiver, its gibbous eyes glow…
Then dawn, wearing golden sandals, awoke me.

Merciless daughter of Zeus, immortal Aphrodite,
Come to me, sing to me, low-voiced, in sorrow
Of migrating birds that stream over the dark sea.

Cast aside your spangled headband: in my mirror I see
You beneath these stringy locks, puckered lips, and tearstained cheeks… go,
Migrating birds, stream over the dark sea;
And dawn, wearing golden sandals, awake me.

MARK FORD

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hardly penetrated the cities, where written literature developed under the influence of Persian, Arabic and, in the nineteenth century, French. By 1920 the written language, which was for all intents and purposes mutually indistinguishable from what was spoken in Anatolia, consisted of roughly 75 percent loan words and 25 percent Turkish ones. For Atatürk and other like-minded reformers in the new republic, that ratio presented a problem: it was fine for a polyglot empire to have a mongrel tongue, but a nation-state needed its own "pure" one. They therefore embarked on an ambitious linguistic revision, purging the language of loan words as far as possible and adopting a new script based on the Latin to replace the old Arabic one.

In *Memed, My Hawk*, legends arise from the confusion of lived experience.

The revamped language may have served a political purpose, but it was stilted and sterile, inadequate for literature. Kemal's goal as he began writing, he told Bosquet, was "to combine the potential of the living, rich Turkish of the Cukurova"—where the reforms hadn't really penetrated, because most of the people were illiterate—"with the written language of the cities."

As it happened, it wasn't until Kemal relocated to Turkey's largest city that he was able to realize his linguistic and literary ambitions. In early 1951, with the help of a friend, he landed a job in Istanbul at the newspaper *Cumhuriyet* as its Anatolian correspondent. That proved to be the turning point in his life. Since the authorities in Cukurova had constantly harassed him, and even imprisoned him for several months on charges of spreading communism, he took the pen name Yashar Kemal to throw the police off his trail before he headed east on assignment. He traveled for a few months, filing features on life in the hinterlands. Unbeknown to him, his articles' innovative and richly descriptive language caused a sensation. None of his forebears had his knack for description or his felicity with natural—and unpatronizing—demotic expression, which brought his subjects to life on the page. When he returned to Istanbul, he found that he was a minor celebrity. The police soon learned his real identity, but by then his fame afforded him a measure of protection. Suddenly, doors began to open. In 1952 he published a book of short stories, *Yellow Heat*. Three years later came his first novel.

Memed, My Hawk is the story of Slim Memed, a poor but steely village lad who runs afoul of the local aga, or lord, and flees to the mountains to become a brigand, and eventually a legendary folk hero in the mold of Robin Hood or Billy the Kid. The plot is deceptively simple: it's essentially the modern retelling of the oral epics Kemal had fallen in love with as a boy. But that simplicity belies the novel's feats. Woven around the story of Slim Memed are a series of finely wrought set pieces and extended observations peppered with wry comments about a range of subjects: the insularity, but sadly not the self-sufficiency, of Anatolian village life; the physical transformation of the countryside, and the psychological transformation of its inhabitants, that ensue from the adoption of freehold and large-scale commercial farming; the rapacity of the provincial nouveaux riches, who are restrained neither by dying custom nor the distant state.

In the hands of a lesser writer, modern themes like these would hang awkwardly on the staid structure of epic; but in Kemal's, the combination works. Moving deftly between realistic and incantatory modes, Kemal throws each into illuminating contrast. For example, just as the reader is lulled into a sense of timelessness by the novel's folk-epic rhythms ("I came and saw the bolted door,/ Her black hair plaited all with gold…"), a finely observed slice of reality (such as shoe soles "cut from the rubber tire of a car") will intrude with jarring effect. Conversely, just as the accumulation of details threatens to undercut the story's epic sweep, Kemal will lapse into the villagers' collective voice. In one instance he describes how, during battle, Memed would turn into "a giant of a man" who could wield "a huge pine log in his hand" and whom bullets couldn't harm, only to resume his normal proportions afterward ("One minute he was tall as a poplar, then small again"). By employing such sequences, Kemal neatly illustrates how legends—such as Slim Memed's—arise from the confusion of lived experience.

Memed, My Hawk is a masterpiece, and was immediately recognized as such. Appealing both to critics (who hailed it as the book of the year) and the reading public (who made it Turkey's first native bestseller), it turned Kemal into a bona fide star and instantly cemented his literary reputation. Unesco and the International Federation of PEN Clubs selected it for translation into French and English; other foreign editions followed. In time the novel was translated into forty languages. Kemal had become the first Turkish writer to attract worldwide attention.

The outsize success of *Memed, My Hawk* had one drawback: it made Kemal a very large target. He had long had trouble with the police, but once the novel became an international phenomenon, "The number of people out for my blood increased," he told a Turkish interviewer. Political opponents began to hound him, and behind the scenes the authorities started pressuring *Cumhuriyet* either to collar and muzzle him or to set him stray. Things got even worse when, in 1962, he joined the Turkish Workers' Party—the first avowedly Marxist party to win representation in Parliament. The political atmosphere was somewhat freer at that point, owing to the 1960 coup d'état, which led to a much more liberal Constitution, under which the Workers' Party was allowed to operate freely and openly. But the establishment was still incredibly hostile to the far left, which it associated with the Soviet Union. (It's worth remembering that the Truman Doctrine, which kicked off the cold war, was conceived in order to shore up Greece and Turkey against Soviet encroachments after World War II.) As long as Kemal kept a relatively low profile, his celebrity protected him; but once he became politically active, the equation reversed: he drew too much attention to a party deemed a threat. Thus, in 1963 the government pressured *Cumhuriyet* into firing him, and a film adaptation of *Memed, My Hawk*, the rights to which were purchased by Twentieth Century Fox in 1964, was killed by government censors.

From 1963 to 1968, Kemal gave a great deal of his time to the party. At first, he served only as head of the propaganda committee (a job that fell to him because the other leaders, all "intellectual Turks," didn't know how to talk to the workers). Later, he also joined the central committee and helped to found and edit the magazine *Ant*, which served as the party's mouthpiece. Many of his friends within the party were Kurds; under their influence the "Kurdish question" moved toward the center of his thoughts. Then, in 1968, in the aftermath of the Prague Spring, the party split. Its leadership fell to a pro-Soviet faction; Kemal and his friends, who opposed the Soviet invasion, were abruptly sidelined. Even so, when

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in 1971 another coup ushered in a more repressive order, he was arrested and held in jail for twenty-six days before being released without charge. Thereafter, apart from a few brief and halfhearted flirtations, he forsook politics in order to focus on his art.

Though he remained committed as ever to the left's moral compass, Kemal was glad to step off the stage, because working for the party had had, as he puts it, "a very deleterious effect on my creativity." He became a full-time writer. As a result, his output surged: from 1967 to 1978 he averaged a book a year. In 1968 he finished *The Undying Grass*, which forms a trilogy with *The Wind From the Plain* (1960) and *Iron Earth, Copper Sky* (1963). (Some consider this trilogy, which tells the story of a highland village's journey to and from the plains of Cukurova in order to pick cotton for the summer, his best work.) He also wrote *They Burn the Thistles* (1969), a sequel to *Memed, My Hawk*; *The Legend of a Thousand Bulls* (1971), an examination of how a tribe of Yoruk nomads adapt (or not) to modern society; *Murder in the Ironsmith's Market* (1974), about how two rural lords cling to their traditional blood vendetta even as changing socioeconomic circumstances render it moot; and *To Crush the Serpent* (1976), wherein he grapples with an intensely personal topic: the pressure heaped upon a boy, by his family and his village, to kill the person deemed responsible for his father's murder. In 1978 Kemal branched off in a new direction, publishing *The Birds Have Also Gone* and *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*, both of which are set in contemporary Istanbul and both of which examine the struggles of poor folk—transplants from the countryside—to adapt not only to life in the city but also to the mores of a society that's hellbent on material gain and heedless of consumerism's environmental spoliation.

In 1995 Kemal once again captured the world's attention, though this time not for his fiction. Writing in *Der Spiegel*, he castigated the Turkish government for its treatment of the Kurds. At the time, Turkey was in the midst of a long-running and bloody guerrilla war with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a separatist organization that was fighting to establish an independent Kurdish state. Kemal didn't condone the PKK's terroristic actions or its separatist platform; indeed, he pointed out that most Kurds didn't even want a separate state. But he did write sympathetically of their grievances and argued that Kurds were within their rights to seek independence if they wanted it. That was too much for Turkey's hardliners, who saw to it that Kemal was prosecuted for advocating separatism. Kemal was eventually acquitted, but not before his trial had become a cause célèbre. A group of Turkish intellectuals rallied to his defense and put their names to a book of essays on freedom of speech, which contained Kemal's *Der Spiegel* article as well as another, even more provocative, one he had published in *Index on Censorship*. That essay—in which Kemal labeled Turkey's government a "racist, oppressive regime" that had "crushed all the people of Anatolia like a steamroller" and, after yet another coup in 1980, had "made informers of ordinary citizens, created bloody wolf-mouthed confessors, and totally destroyed human morality"—led to a second trial in 1996, in which he was slapped with a suspended twenty-month sentence "for inciting hatred." Afterward, though he continued to publish in Turkey, Kemal's translations slowed to a trickle, and he faded from the international spotlight.

Kerstin Ekman, a novelist and onetime member of the Swedish Academy, has called Kemal "an author as big as Mount Ararat." That seems about right. Even now, in his late 80s, he's a barrel-chested bull of a man, with the personality to match; and his résumé, if anything, is even more imposing. He has published forty books, several of them outstanding and one of them a true classic. But accurate as Ekman's description may be, it's not very enlightening: it speaks to the scope but not to the nature of Kemal's accomplishments. What to say about the latter?

When Bosquet asked Kemal to describe himself, the latter replied, "I am a novelist of transformation—of the changes Turkey is undergoing." It's a truer statement than he knew or intended. Kemal simply meant that he tried, in his writings, to comprehend those changes and expose their workings; and that he certainly has done. But his life has been more representative of Turkey's twentieth-century transformation than have any of his writings—perhaps even more than their sum. For in the end they all reflect but facets of his experience, whereas there's a great deal of his life, such as his political involvement, that's illustrative but absent from the pages of his novels. What's more, Kemal hasn't just been a chronicler or an embodiment of change; he has been an instigator of it. Along with Nâzim Hikmet, Turkey's most beloved poet, he has done for Turkish what Twain did for American English, or Pushkin for Russian: reinvigorate the written language by infusing it with the colloquial. (His success in that regard was so thoroughgoing that a linguist published a *Yashar Kemal Dictionary*.) Indeed, he may even have helped, in some small way, to reorient policy. After decades of hounding him and other like-minded writers, the Turkish government has recently done an about-face and begun showering him with honors, including its highest: the Presidential Cultural and Artistic Grand Prize. More important, it asked him to serve as a mediator as it tries to negotiate a solution to the Kurdish issue. Though efforts at compromise have recently run aground, the mere fact that the two sides were talking—and had identified an intermediary they both respected and would listen to—represents significant progress.

What further transformations does Turkey's bard of change anticipate? He's concerned, above all else, about the environment: forests burned and razed; swamps drained; and dolphins stalked, speared and rendered into blubber by the desperate fishermen of the Marmara. He's concerned not only about what those changes mean for the world but also about what they mean for the men and women who inhabit it—for their customs, their psychology, their humanity—because for him the world of human creation, of culture, ambition, fantasy and dreams, is shaped by the concrete, physical world in which we're born and bound to live through both pleasure and pain. Indeed, that concern has been the major undercurrent of almost all his works. For Kemal, ever the idiosyncratic Marxist, it is changes in the environment—not in the ownership of the means of production—that shape history and human evolution. And he doesn't like the road we're on.

Yet for all these concerns, Kemal is not worried. "I have never been a pessimist," he writes. Nor is he (again, *pace* Marx) a determinist. "The human species, which is afraid of the dark, invents for itself myths and dreamworlds so that it can continue on its way, and whenever it feels itself hemmed in, it will find the means to save itself. Modern technology has brought us to the situation we are in now, but it is also technology that will allow us to escape that situation." As for himself, Kemal writes the following: "Never has our world known such overwhelming change. I belong to this time—in the factories and fields, in politics and thought—and as long as I can, and with all my strength, I will keep up this pace. I take pride in knowing that I have one foot on the ancient land of Anatolia, the birthplace of Homer, and one foot on the Russian steppe. I am chagrined at my own poverty in the midst of such riches. Humans need a world of dreams where they can go forth to discover themselves. I do what I can." ■

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Bierced

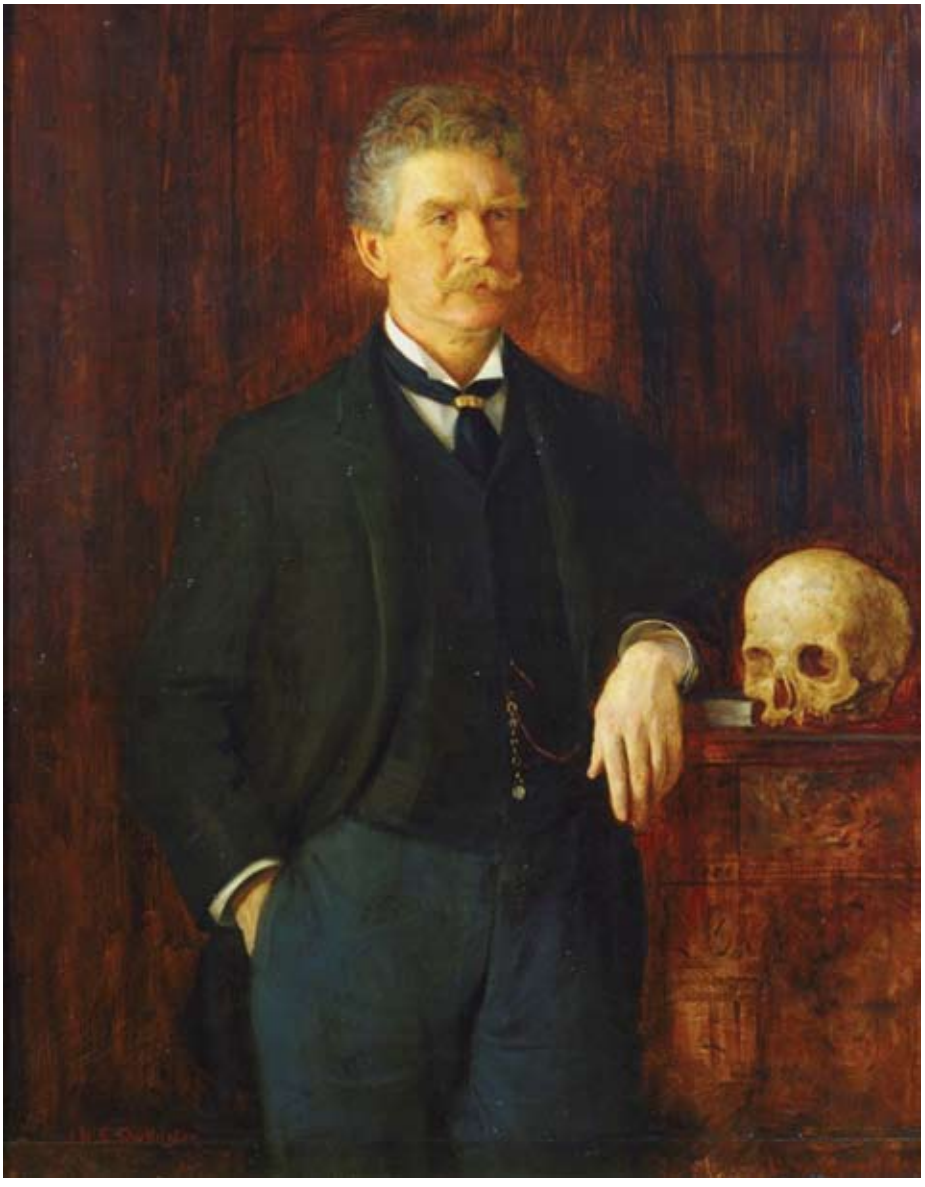
by VICTOR LaVALLE

On June 23, 1864, Ambrose Bierce was in command of a skirmish line of Union soldiers at Kennesaw Mountain in northern Georgia. He'd been a soldier for three years, and in that time had been commended by his superiors for his efficiency and bravery during battle. He'd been pretty fortunate so far. Three years of hard fighting—on the ground and wielding a rifle—without serious injury. But that day in June a Confederate marksman shot Ambrose Bierce right in the head.

The bullet fractured Bierce's temporal lobe and got stuck in his skull, behind his left ear. He was sent by railroad to Chattanooga for medical care, riding along with other wounded soldiers on an open flat car for two days, their bodies covered by nothing more than a tarp. They rode this way through the June heat of Georgia, as well as drizzling rains. At night the "bright cold moonlight" gave Bierce jarring headaches. Somehow, none of this killed Ambrose Bierce—one of American literature's great stubborn bastards.

In fact, nobody knows how Bierce died. In 1913, at the age of 71, he traveled from Northern California to Mexico. He wanted to check out all the ruckus Pancho Villa had been causing. Bierce departed and was never seen or heard from again. By then he'd become famous as the caustic columnist for, among others, William Randolph Hearst's *San Francisco Examiner*. He'd been hired personally by Hearst. Bierce's columns attacked corporate malfeasance and government incompetence, and sometimes just railed about the failings of the entire human race. Besides fiction and journalism, Bierce also wrote book reviews. He wasn't a soft touch. One of his most famous reviews is one sentence long: "The covers of this book are too far apart." By the time of Bierce's disappearance, his literary reputation had been overshadowed by writers like Mark Twain and Stephen Crane. And today, a century of reader indifference has succeeded where that Rebel sniper failed. Ambrose Bierce is long dead (probably!), and his stories have pretty much been buried. But perhaps the time has finally come to resurrect them.

Victor LaValle is the author, most recently, of the novel Big Machine *and a recipient of a 2010 Guggenheim Fellowship.*



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A painting of Ambrose Bierce by John Herbert Evelyn Partington

Ambrose Bierce was born on June 24, 1842, in Horse Cave Creek, Ohio, a fundamentalist community not far from the West Virginia border. His parents were true believers who might've had a bit of an odd streak as well. Ambrose was the tenth child in the family, and the names of his nine older siblings were Abigail, Amelia, Ann, Addison, Aurelius, Augustus, Almeda, Andrew and Albert. Ambrose Bierce hated his folks. He rarely depicted parents in his fiction, but if they appeared at all it was usually as having recently died—sometimes at the hands of a very Bierce-like narrator. In fact, one of Bierce's books was a collection of stories called *The Parenticide Club*. No one's claiming Bierce was the most likable dude in American literature.

Ambrose's father, Marcus Aurelius Bierce, held many jobs—farmer, shopkeeper and county overseer of the poor—though he enjoyed no successes in any of these professions. But he was an avid reader. His personal collection of books was possibly the largest in the county. And it was in his father's library that Bierce began his life as a serious reader. Though Bierce rarely said a nice word about his family, he never denied the great gift of his father's collection.

If Bierce is known today, it's for writing the kind of reference work he might've longed to find on his father's bookshelves. *The Devil's Dictionary*, published in 1911, is a collection of warped, witty and just plain cruel definitions of words in common American usage:

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ABSTAINER, *n*. A weak person who yields to the temptation of denying himself a pleasure.

HEARSE, *n*. Death's baby-carriage.

HEATHEN, *n*. A benighted creature who has the folly to worship something that he can see and feel.

LECTURER, *n*. One with his hand in your pocket, his tongue in your ear and his faith in your patience.

The Devil's Dictionary goes on like this, and you can see the appeal. The definitions are short, the ideas easy to grasp, the humor reliably fierce. *The Devil's Dictionary* reads like a collection of great Twitter posts. And as people do with tweets, they can swipe Bierce's best lines and recite them as nearly their own. The reflected glory of reposting.

It's an understandable pleasure. A lot of these definitions are bitingly funny. And maybe *The Devil's Dictionary* has endured longer than Bierce's fiction because its tone seems more modern, its confluence with our time apparently easier to appreciate.

But before Bierce could write any books, he had to leave the family farm. In *Ambrose Bierce: Alone in Bad Company*, Roy Morris Jr. notes that Bierce's family moved to Indiana when he was 4. For the next eleven years Ambrose was an isolated child, aloof from his siblings as well as his schoolmates. He didn't even like dogs or cats. His favorite animals were snakes and lizards.

At 15 Ambrose left the family to work for the *Northern Indianan*, an abolitionist newspaper. His father was an early antislavery advocate, but it seems just as likely that Ambrose took the job to get away from the family farm or because he liked to write. The job didn't last long; he was supposedly accused of theft and quit after his name had been cleared. Sometime after that he landed in the home of his Uncle Lucius.

Lucius Bierce was a military man who liked to argue and had an appealing swagger, a man who'd witnessed a slave auction in Charleston, South Carolina, and become an even more ardent abolitionist than Bierce's father. In 1838 Lucius led a militia across Lake Erie and into Windsor, Ontario, with plans to "liberate" the town from the British yoke. The plan failed, but the legend was a hell of a lot more interesting to Ambrose than Marcus Bierce's story of poverty and piousness. The argumentative, ambitious, self-important Ambrose had found a man he could admire and emulate.

Then, on April 12, 1861, the Battle of Fort Sumter popped off in South Carolina. On April 19, Ambrose enlisted in the Union Army: Company C, Ninth Indiana Volunteers.

He was 18.

In four years of fighting, Ambrose Bierce saw impossible things. And much to his regret, he remembered them. In time he wrote some of them down.

In the realm of fiction, Bierce wrote short stories exclusively. He disdained novels. In a short essay titled "The Short Story" he dismisses novels as "mere reporting." Here he took aim, specifically, at realist literature. His problem with realism lay in the question of "probability." Could this incident really have happened? Would a person ever do such a thing? Bierce found this line of reasoning preposterous, if only because it meant a story's limits were determined by the reader, not the writer. It meant that if a reader couldn't imagine that such an event was possible, probable, then somehow the writer had failed. Toward the end of the essay Bierce blows his top. "Probability? Nothing is so improbable as what is true. It is the unexpected that occurs; but that is not saying enough; it is also the unlikely—one might almost say the impossible."

Declarations like these could easily come across as trite if expressed by many other writers. They could be taken as the noises of nothing but a thin-skinned author trying to defend himself against claims that his fiction is unconvincing, unbelievable. But Bierce isn't so easy to dismiss.

His most famous story, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," concerns Peyton Farquhar, a Southern planter from an established Alabama family. He's been captured by the Union Army and is to be hanged for acts in support of the "Southern cause." The story contains a surprise ending, and while it is somewhat effective, it is also uncharacteristic because Bierce had a weakness for twist endings that rarely worked at all. But that's OK; much as with Stephen King and Martin Amis, you don't read Ambrose Bierce for the finale. You read him for the profound perceptual play:

> He closed his eyes in order to fix his last thoughts upon his wife and children. The water, touched to gold by the early sun, the brooding mists under the banks at some distance down the stream, the fort, the soldiers, the piece of drift—all had distracted him. And now he became conscious of a new disturbance. Striking through the thought of his dear ones was a sound which he could neither ignore nor understand, a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith's hammer upon the anvil; it had the same ringing quality. He wondered what it was, and whether immeasurably distant or nearby—it seemed both. Its recurrence was regular, but as slow as the tolling of a death knell. He awaited each stroke with impatience and—he knew not why—apprehension. The intervals of silence grew progressively longer; the delays became maddening. With their greater infrequency the sounds increased in strength and sharpness. They hurt his ear like the thrust of a knife: he feared he would shriek. What he heard was the ticking of his watch.

In another powerful story, "The Affair at Coulter's Notch," Bierce writes of a face-off between two batteries of well-fortified Confederate cannons, twelve in total, and a single Union cannon crew led by Captain Coulter. Coulter's crew is forced into an open notch and ordered to engage in a firefight just because a general in the field wants to see if the stories of Coulter's bravery are true. Though Coulter hesitates, he follows the order. He and his crew wheel one cannon out to the notch and commence firing. Soon the twelve Confederate cannons respond and the two sides are lost in the thunderous explosions and enormous clouds of artillery smoke. Each time one of Coulter's cannons is destroyed, his crew wheels a new one up to the notch so the fight can continue. Eventually the Union officers ride up to the notch to check on Coulter and his men:

> Within that defile, barely broad enough for a single gun, were piled the wrecks of no fewer than four. They had noted the silencing of only the last one disabled—there had been a lack of men to replace it quickly with another. The debris lay on both sides of the road; the men had managed to keep an open way between, through which the fifth piece was now firing. The men?—they looked like demons of the pit! All were hatless, all stripped to the waist, their reeking skins black with blotches of powder and spattered with gouts of blood. They worked like madmen, with rammer and cartridge, lever and lanyard. They set their swollen shoulders and bleeding hands against the wheels at each recoil and heaved the heavy gun back to its place. There were no

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commands; in that awful environment of whooping shot, exploding shells, shrieking fragments of iron, and flying splinters of wood, none could have been heard. Officers, if officers there were, were indistinguishable; all worked together—each while he lasted—governed by the eye. When the gun was sponged, it was loaded; when loaded, aimed and fired. The colonel observed something new to his military experience—something horrible and unnatural: the gun was bleeding at the mouth! In temporary default of water, the man sponging had dipped his sponge into a pool of comrade's blood.

This kind of prose is what Bierce rattles off on the regular, and even his weakest stories contain some pungent moment, even just an aside. A belch across the table at probability. An assertion that sometimes fiction's job is to conceive the inconceivable.

In light of such writing, Bierce's disdain for "mere reporting" becomes clearer. While it's true his work often made use of personal experiences—particularly as a soldier in the Civil War—a reader would be hard-pressed to call it straight journalism. The journalistic endeavor—at least theoretically—is grounded in objectivity. The goal is to get you to understand what happened, when and to whom. But Bierce is a beast of subjectivity. He means for the reader to experience these events as fully as the written word allows. He doesn't just want to tell you what happened. He wants you to understand how it felt.

In another piece, "Chickamauga," Bierce fictionalizes one of the most hellacious battles of the Civil War, one in which he fought. In the story a child wanders into the woods near his home, away from his mother, and comes across a mass of wounded soldiers fleeing the titular battlefield:

> They were men. They crept upon their hands and knees. They used their hands only, dragging their legs. They used their knees only, their arms hanging idle at their sides. They strove to rise to their feet, but fell prone in the attempt. They did nothing naturally, and nothing alike, save only to advance foot by foot in the same direction. Singly, in pairs and in little groups, they came on through the gloom, some halting now and again while others crept slowly past them, then resuming their movement. They came by dozens and by

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hundreds; as far on either hand as one could see in the deepening gloom they extended and the black wood behind them appeared to be inexhaustible. The very ground seemed in motion toward the creek. Occasionally one who had paused did not again go on, but lay motionless. He was dead. Some, pausing, made strange gestures with their hands, erected their arms and lowered them again, clasped their heads; spread their palms upward, as men are sometimes seen to do in public prayer.

There are writers who glorify and writers who testify. Bierce is often compared to Stephen Crane and Ernest Hemingway, glorifiers, mostly because all three were Americans who wrote about war. But one of the reasons Bierce has probably been forgotten, in comparison with them, is that he's so deeply misunderstood. Whereas Crane and Hemingway wrote about war, Bierce wrote about being a soldier. It's worth pointing out that he's the only writer among them who ever actually fought in the military.

Valor doesn't equal literary value, but Bierce's experiences are singular. His best fiction asks you to inhabit that role rather than simply survey it. He testifies. Bierce has more in common with artists of perception like Isaac Babel and Jean Rhys. Babel's *Red Cavalry* stories express events during the Polish-Soviet War, all of them as dynamic and improbable as Bierce's best; Rhys's early novels, like *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, don't just illustrate the lives of dissolute and demolished young women; they're more like invitations to endure that self-destruction ourselves.

Bierce's reputation has suffered because of a common mistake in literary criticism. He's compared to writers he looks like rather than writers he writes like.

Bierce wrote startlingly vivid portrayals of the improbable, the seemingly impossible, a quality probably best described as the uncanny. The term actually appears, here and there, in a number of his stories. "Uncanny" is generally defined as "having or seeming to have a supernatural or inexplicable basis; beyond the ordinary or normal; extraordinary." Bierce's dismissal of the probable and his passionate belief in the impossible were nurtured by his experiences in the Civil War, the external manifestation of our nation's internal crisis that Faulkner called "the fever which had cured the disease."

America was battling to redefine itself. Institutions that had helped found this nation were under threat of being dismantled. The great gears of transformation were grinding the whole damn country down. States' rights versus the will of the federal government. Injustices, once seen as inherent to the system, were being challenged in the courts and on the streets. Americans, on all sides, were losing their minds because of the pressure and the fear. And somewhere in Georgia, Ambrose Bierce had a bullet lodged behind his left ear. I highly doubt Bierce would've been able to fathom, let alone imagine, our present era. But he might've recognized it.

The United States has found itself fighting two wars, and the commander in chief is a black guy from Hawaii. The largest banks in our financial system practically write laws and then have their elected officials simply co-sign the bills. Old white folks show up at political rallies packing heat and threatening secession. Everyone swears they're broke in the midst of the recession, but Apple sold 300,000 iPads the first day the gadget was on sale. And by the way, a giant oil slick is attacking the Gulf Coast.

We too are living in an uncanny age. Sometimes I can't keep my Hutarees and my Bernankes straight. Iran may get itself some nuclear bombs sooner than we think, and China threatens either to call in our debts or collapse, choking on its own contaminated air. Times like these can start to seem so fantastic, so improbable, that the straight story just won't capture the near-pandemonium. I don't believe the world is coming to an end, but on certain days it sure as hell can feel that way. Which is really what Ambrose Bierce was trying to approximate in his fiction. The experience of the uncanny. The settings and circumstances may have changed between his time and ours, but his sensibilities seem particularly attuned to the world we live in now.

His fiction can help to expose the lie at the heart of so much contemporary literary fiction, which holds that realism is the most honest way to capture life in our times. I'm saying that viewpoint is plain wrong, or at least uninspired. And Ambrose backs me up. His definition of realism in *The Devil's Dictionary* suggests another way to think of that particular school of writing: "REALISM, *n.* The art of depicting nature as it is seen by toads."

Bierce often resorted to horror, whether grisly war stories or even supernatural tales, but he didn't do this to avoid writing about reality; he used the genre to confront the

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truths of his day—the monstrosity of battle, the terror of extinction.

Read Bierce and try not to think of soldiers fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Read Bierce and consider the ways "probability" can be a poor test; sometimes realism just fails. Every era needs a genre through which it understands itself. We are living in the age of the uncanny once again. Time to testify. ■

COURTESY OF HBO

Anne Lotierzo in *12th & Delaware*

Cornered

by STUART KLAWANS

The most suspenseful movie I have seen in a long time, with the most unsettling characters and the most devastating conclusion, recently enjoyed its New York theatrical premiere and then closed on the same evening. Ordinarily, I would call this an injustice; but there is really nothing unfair about the reception given so far to Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady's *12th & Delaware*, unless it's the assumption that a documentary selection of the annual Human Rights Watch Film Festival (where this picture was the opening-night feature) must be the cinematic equivalent of boiled leafy vegetables. Yes, *12th & Delaware* might be good for you. But given the film's effect on the heart rate, I'd say the kind of good it delivers is closer to what you'd get from an aerobic workout—an effect you will be able to experience when HBO broadcasts the movie on August 2, as part of its new season of documentaries.

The topic is the campaign against abortion, as played out at the title intersection in Fort Pierce, Florida, on a street corner where tangles of low-slung electrical cables droop over shedlike ranch houses and their strips of sidewalk, a little more than 100 miles up from Miami along Interstate 95. Here, in a building that's been painted orange so clients can spot it easily, a married couple, Candace and Arnold, have run an abortion clinic for many years; while more recently, across the street, a Catholic group has converted the facing property into something it calls a pregnancy care center. Listen to the members of the antiabortion group, and you hear that the center speaks on behalf of unborn children and persuades mothers not to commit a grievous sin. Watch what the center does, and you see that it mostly waylays the confused (who were looking for the clinic); offers free ultrasounds captioned "Hi Mommy" (along with medically inaccurate brochures and bloodcurdling video screenings); and provides a base for the day-long demonstrations and one-sided shouting matches that the group mounts across the street.

Granted, the characterization I've just given is based entirely on the evidence that Ewing and Grady chose to present in *12th & Delaware*. But that's just the point. Ewing and Grady won extraordinary, prolonged, close access to both the clients and the personnel of the pregnancy care center—notably its director, a petite, pinch-featured, middle-aged woman named Anne Lotierzo, who opened her consulting rooms to the filmmakers, walked around wearing their radio microphone (so her words could be picked up at a distance) and seems never to have bothered to watch what she said or did. Pretty much the whole first half of *12th & Delaware* is shot among Lotierzo's circle, and mostly within her pseudo clinic. In the course of this immersion into one local instance of the antiabortion movement, you see Lotierzo rig evidence, peddle falsehoods, browbeat and condescend. Anything goes, apparently, for reasons best articulated by Lotierzo's spiritual adviser, Father Tom Euteneuer, when he explains (in a sermon delivered in church) that the fight is against "the powers of darkness." The abortion industry, he preaches, is "looking more and more like a diabolical religion"—a ritualized blood sacrifice offered on the perverse altar of an operating table. "There's got to be demons involved in that."

From this detail and many others in the first half of *12th & Delaware*, you may derive the unhappy lesson that the conflict over abortion probably will not be resolved by reasoned compromise. ("I know it will end," Lotierzo says. "I just don't think it's going to be…pretty.") From the second half of the film, shot in large measure within the abortion clinic, you may learn what it means to seek medical treatment, and give it, under siege.

A door that you had seen only from the outside now closes as you watch from within; and with this elegant transition, the film moves to the other side of Twelfth Street, where there's a lot of peering through the slats of Venetian blinds, scanning the screens of surveillance monitors and leafing through a scrapbook of news reports about the violent deaths of abortion doctors. (The film was made in the wake of the 2009 murder of Dr. George Tiller.) With the picketers pressing within a millimeter of the legal limit whenever Arnold drives in or out of the clinic, and with some of the angrier protesters walking up to the windows to bellow at the women inside, the possibility of violence is part of the atmosphere, like the Florida humidity. You see how it weighs on Candace—though she bears up well with her gentle, solicitous manner and comfortably plump physique. A whim of the God of documentaries: the abortion provider turns out to be the most maternal figure in *12th & Delaware*.

So tense and compelling is the film in its matched claustrophobias—moral on one side of the street, physical on the other—that one scene even made me wonder whether Ewing and Grady had needed to intervene. An ethical borderline was clearly crossed when the most threatening of the antiabor-

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tion protesters, a hulking man with a shaved head and a propensity for rage, managed to identify one of the abortion doctors. It was standard practice, you see, for Arnold to pick up the doctors at remote locations (in this case the parking lot of a Wal-Mart) and throw a sheet over them, which the doctors would not remove until the clinic's garage door had safely closed. This system broke down on a day when the filmmakers took a ride with Hulk and witnessed him locate an abortion doctor's car and write down its license plate number. With great satisfaction, he remarked (on camera) that he was going to pass this information to some people who would "know what to do with it."

I asked Ewing, via e-mail, whether she and Grady had warned the doctor. "We first immediately investigated whether an illegal act had taken place in our presence and if we were required to contact the authorities," she replied. "It turned out the pro-life subject had not broken the law but we felt compelled to contact the appropriate party who would inform the doctor and the driver to change their meeting point."

Is *The Killer Inside Me* trying to tell us that a little kink for spanking can get out of hand?

That making *12th & Delaware* could put Ewing and Grady into this situation—and that watching the result can in effect do the same to you—is a sign of the film's strength and daring. The sign of its terrible sorrow is that the filmmakers could not step in for the people who most needed intervention: women pregnant at 15, or pregnant by men they feared, or pregnant with their sixth child when they had no resources for the existing five. These were, these are, the women caught between Lotierzo's version of help on one side of Twelfth Street and a line of angry demonstrators on the other. For them, the best Ewing and Grady could do was bear witness.

You should, too.

If *12th & Delaware* brings up the question of documentarians' relationship to their subjects, then Tim Hetherington and Sebastian Junger's war film *Restrepo*—another selection of the Human Rights Watch Film Festival, as well as a prize-winner at Sundance and a new theatrical release—makes you wonder about another issue: the relationship of a documentarian to his audience.

Shot (there's the exact word for you) in 2007–08 in Afghanistan's Korengal Valley, *Restrepo* gives an unadorned, soldier's-eye view of the experiences of a platoon of the 173rd Airborne Brigade, as it patrols the lush and relentlessly hostile landscape, establishes a strategically important but isolated and exposed outpost (just a ring of sandbags on a hilltop at first, plus a barrel in which to burn feces) and comes under fire from all directions, all the time. Intercut with these action scenes are affecting interviews with some of the soldiers, recorded elsewhere after their deployment ended, in which you encounter these men in a reflective mood. But the moments that are more likely to come to mind when you think back on *Restrepo* are the ones of adrenaline-fueled chaos, with both the soldiers and the filmmakers scrambling for their lives.

No one should underestimate the achievement of Hetherington and Junger in bringing back this footage; nor should the implications of their film be overlooked, despite the filmmakers' avowal that they weren't out to make a political statement. The platoon's commanding officer, Capt. Dan Kearney—the sort of smart, solid, responsible soldier you would want in the field—sums up the dilemma of the US campaign against the Taliban when he explains that he's asking the Korengal villagers to push out their own family members. The frustration of the campaign, and its horror, is written on Kearney's face after he calls down a helicopter strike on a supposed Taliban haven and learns that he's inadvertently killed five civilians, young children among them. Soon the radio chatter tells him that the village elders, with whom he'd been meeting regularly, are calling for jihad.

The conclusion you might draw is that the Taliban and their families live in the Korengal Valley, whereas the Americans are just visiting. They set up their temporary outposts at great risk, fight to survive the deployment and then (with undisguised joy and relief) are rotated back home, having "done our job" without necessarily changing much of anything.

You, documentary viewer, are probably just visiting, too. Like the majority of Americans today, you are remote from combat and relatively untouched by it. But because the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are America's first point-and-shoot video wars, you can watch *Gunner Palace*, *Occupation: Dreamland*, *Severe Clear* or now *Restrepo* and dip for a few minutes into the reality of our volunteer soldiers, much as the soldiers dip for a period into the reality of the lands they occupy.

On the principle that it's better to know than not to know, I have to figure that the filmmakers are rendering us a service. But the refrain that runs through all these films—the boastful complaint that civilians just can't understand a soldier's life—might remind us that even with documentarians as brave and committed as Hetherington and Junger, the service is limited.

Short Takes: I have struggled to understand why I should have sat through Michael Winterbottom's film version of the irredeemably filthy novel *The Killer Inside Me* by Jim Thompson—whether the excuse was the chic nostalgia for West Texas in the 1950s, the even more chic overlay of cheap Freudianism and Italian opera, or the beyond-chic luxuriance of Winterbottom's images of women being beaten to a pulp—but I can't find a shred of justification for the experience, and I certainly can't recommend it as a date movie. Maybe I was supposed to learn that just because a man is a cop doesn't mean he's gentle and law-abiding—though I probably didn't have to be told as much, having grown up in Chicago. Maybe the lesson was that a little kink for spanking can get seriously out of hand. Or maybe the real take-away is that when characters die horribly, a filmmaker probably should not punctuate the effect with jaunty steel-guitar music. Yes, Casey Affleck gave a sensational performance. So what?

The film I can recommend as a date movie for all audiences—lesbian, gay, transgender and straight—is Lisa Cholodenko's *The Kids Are All Right*. It's the story of a lovely but not so gracefully aging couple (Annette Bening and Julianne Moore), their teenage children (Mia Wasikowska and Josh Hutcherson) and the kids' biological father (Mark Ruffalo): a guy who made a paid deposit to a sperm bank years ago, and now blunders his way into a bigger and bigger role in the lives of people he never even knew existed. The entirely credible setting, in Los Angeles, is on the border between bourgeois respectability and gourmet-organic scruffiness. The characters, as they awkwardly and sometimes guiltily reconfigure themselves, are equally credible, as well as funny, touching and just irritating enough. I can't say that the script (by Cholodenko and Stuart Blumberg) is entirely free of cheap jokes, but I promise that they're only as cheap as they should be. ■

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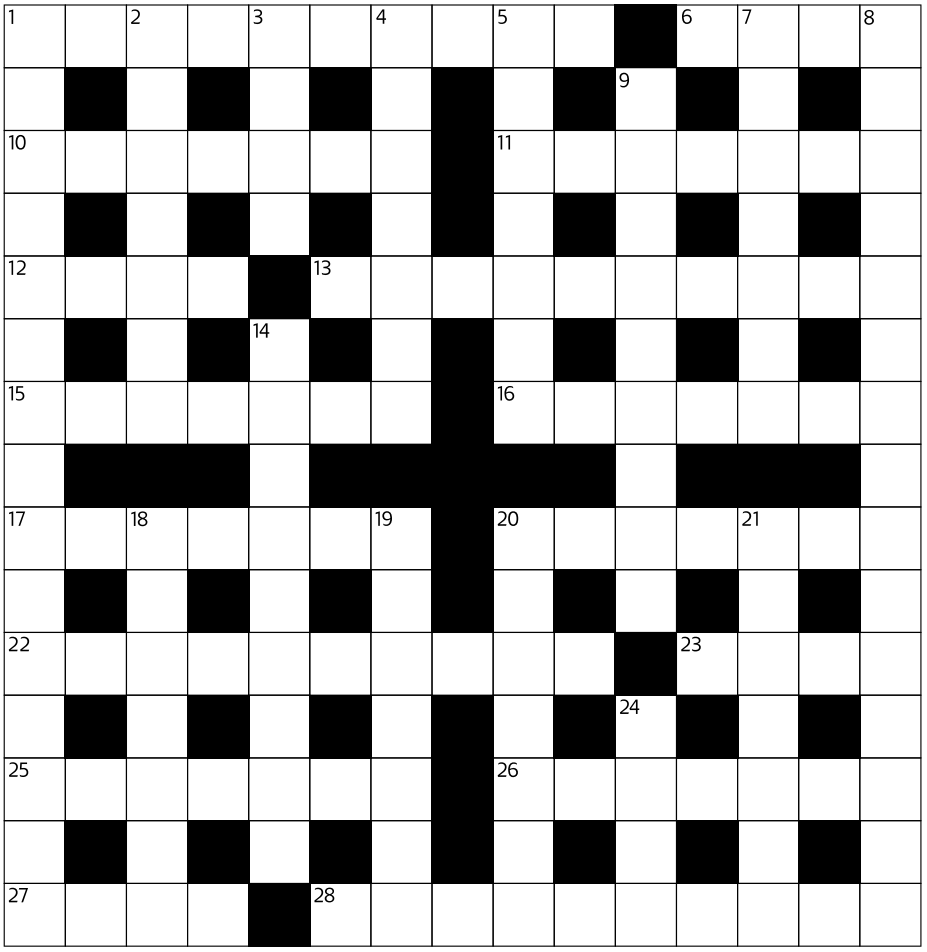
Puzzle No. 1593

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 and **22** Frank talks with Arthur—possibly aired for your benefit? (5-5,10)

6 Fish used as a standard in weight comparison? (4)

10 Writing on finer material? (7)

11 Wanting to work things, by the sound of it. (7)

12 Healing priest? (4)

13 A bad phone connection with me having no French—but it can be scientifically explained. (10)

15 With more flavor. (7)

16 A mark beginners may start from. (7)

17 Music, wine and entertainment a few years ago, or possibly a take-off connected with it. (7)

20 When your world is turbulent, it's naturally upset internally. (7)

22 See 1 across.

23 Is it logical that some might consider his *Wozzeck* cold? (4)

25 I might get to make an elemental change with the traditionally dumb guy I have an appointment with. (7)

26 and **27** The second person to be the subject of old Broadway musical. (2,4,1,4)

28 Those who serve must also look in a stall for it, perhaps. (4,3,3)

DOWN

1 If it does, might your pet come down with it in the fall? (4,4,3,4)

2 The first thing one does in a standard display? (7)

3 The beginning of scale drawings from him? (4)

4 Overturn a throne—but not this one. (7)

5 Rulings that many suits have to some extent. (7)

7 Locks inside this, for protection. (7)

8 It might turn out to be genuine, the big order to partners on the floor. (5,3,7)

9 One might make you sleep. (9)

14 With a couple of seers and an oil can, rub to manipulate. (9)

18 One from the USSR, in a logical disguise. (7)

19 Hardy girl, taking an age to find part of the flooring, perhaps. (7)

20 One might leave early, when the medico has nothing on but a sullen expression. (4-3)

21 The skimper's motto may be unavailing. (7)

24 Catches up by the arm? (4)

This puzzle originally appeared in the July 19, 1975, issue.

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 1592

W	O	R	K	L	I	K	E	A	C	H	A	R	M	
I		E		I		I		W		Y		A		B
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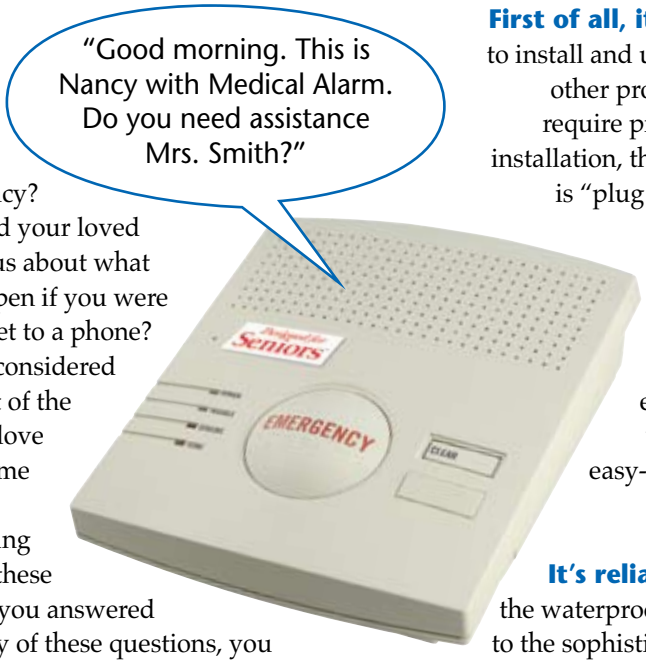

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The Balanced Spectrum® floor lamp brings many of the benefits of natural daylight indoors for glare-free lighting that's perfect for reading.

Ever since the first humans built a fire in their dark cave, people have realized the importance of proper indoor lighting. But ever since Edison invented the light bulb, lighting technology has, unfortunately, remained relatively prehistoric.

Modern light fixtures do little to overcome problems associated with improper lighting. As more and more of us spend longer and longer hours in front of our computer monitor, these problems are compounded. And the effects of improper indoor lighting are not necessarily limited to a physical problem: the quantity and quality of light can also play a part in both our mood and work performance.

Studies show that sunshine can both lift your mood and enhance your energy levels. But as we all know, the sun does not always shine. Now, however, there's a solution to the problem–a way to bring the positive benefits associated with natural daylight indoors. The **Balanced Spectrum® floor lamp** will change not only the way you see, but also the way you feel about your living and work spaces. It brings the benefits of natural daylight indoors, simulating the full spectrum of daylight.

The **Balanced Spectrum's** 27-watt compact bulb is brighter than a 100-watt ordinary light bulb. With the lamp's sharp visibility, you will see with more clarity and enjoyment in close tasks such as reading, writing, sewing, and needlepoint.

Experience sunshine indoors at the touch of a switch. This amazing lamp is not only easy on the eyes, it is easy on the hands as well, featuring a special "soft-touch, flicker-free" rocker switch that is easier to use than traditional toggle or twist switches. And its flexible gooseneck design enables you to get light exactly where you need it. The high-tech electronics, the user-friendly design, and a bulb that lasts 10 times longer than an ordinary bulb–all these features make the **Balanced Spectrum® floor lamp** a must-have.

Try the Balanced Spectrum® floor lamp for the best value ever! Now more than ever is the time to spread sunshine all over the room in your home at this fantastic low price! The Balanced Spectrum® floor lamp comes with *first*STREET's exclusive guarantee. Try this lamp for 90 days and return it for the product purchase price if not completely satisfied.

You don't need the sun to get the natural benefits of daylight

- *See with clarity and enjoyment*
- *Creates natural, glare-free light*
- *Provides sharp visibility*
- *Flexible gooseneck design*
- *Instant-on, flicker-free light*
- *Pays for itself in energy savings over the life of the bulb*

This light can change the way you live and work

"As soon as I turned on the lamp and began to read the newspaper I could see the wonderful difference. This lamp is just what I needed. Thank you so much."
–Donna E.

"For the sewing and knitting that I do, this is the best lamp I've found."
–Kari K.

"Your lamp has been a wonderful help to me in reading my newspaper and magazines. I would hate to be without this lamp, it's made such a difference in my life."
–Kenneth K.

"With this new lamp, there is absolutely no glare and my wife can read without her reading glasses."
–Gerry S.

Dozens of testimonials on file.
Results may vary.

Technology revolutionizes the light bulb

- *Save almost $61 over the life of the bulb*
- *8,000 hours bulb life*
- *Energy efficient*
- *Shows true colors*

Balanced Spectrum® floor lamp ..... was ~~$59.95~~

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*Free shipping within the contiguous 48 states only.

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